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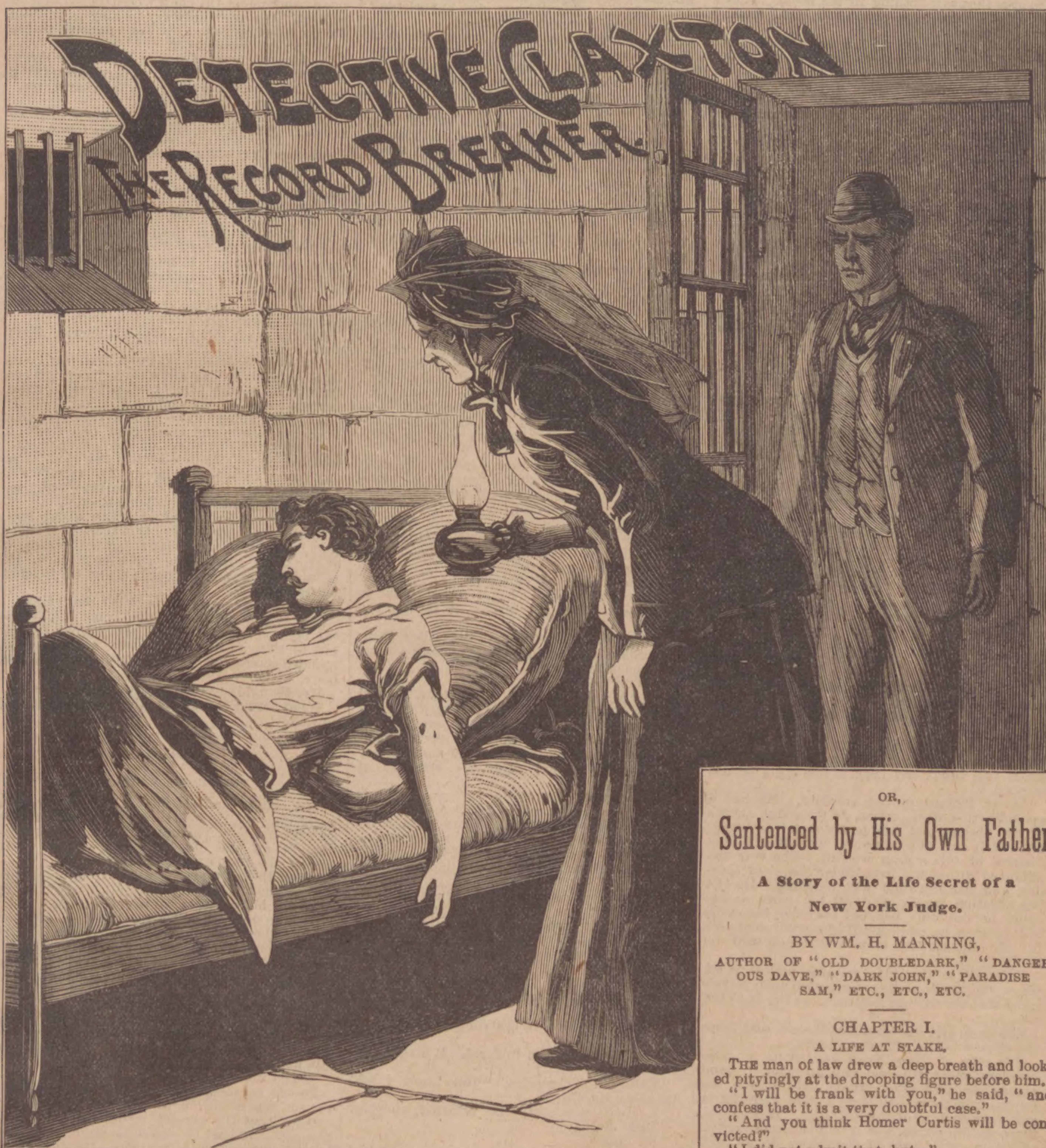
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OR, Sented by His Own Father.

A Story of the Life Secret of a
New York Judge.

BY WM. H. MANNING,
AUTHOR OF "OLD DOUBLEDARK," "DANGER-
OUS DAVE," "DARK JOHN," "PARADISE
SAM," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A LIFE AT STAKE.

THE man of law drew a deep breath and look-
ed pityingly at the drooping figure before him.
"I will be frank with you," he said, "and
confess that it is a very doubtful case."
"And you think Homer Curtis will be con-
victed?"

"I did not admit that, but—"

"Convicted! Convicted of murder! Oh! just
Heaven! is there no relief? Convicted of mur-

"THE PROUD JUDGE'S WIFE HAS FOUND THE PROOF OF DISGRACE!" DETECTIVE
CLAXTON MURMURED.

der, and then— Oh! I shall go mad if this thing happens!"

The scene was in the office of Albert Pollard, attorney-at-law, and it was one which moved him deeply in spite of his long experience with crime, prosecution and sorrow. He was a prosperous man, with a good practice and the air and dress which usually go with such things. The person before him had none of these worldly marks.

She was a girl of something like twenty years. Nature had gifted her rarely as to face and figure, but it was clear she was not of even the middle rank of life, as far as the power of money went. She was neatly, cleanly and decently dressed, but her attire was cheap and plain. Lack of worldly means showed in all ways, and her present air of dejection did not add to her appearance in any but a melancholy way.

The lawyer tried anew to cheer her.

"Do not yet give up hope," he advised.

"But you offer none."

"I have deemed it my duty to be frank—"

"I thank you for it. I asked you to give your candid opinion, and you have been good enough to do so. Better that than to have the end come upon me suddenly, when I was not in condition to bear it as well as now. Still, I am not and never can be prepared to accept the truth. No hope! Merciful Heaven! what does that not mean to me!"

She clasped her hands and stared at vacancy with eyes that saw nothing in the room. They saw only a man in a prison-cell, held under charge of murder.

"Miss Wolf," urged the lawyer, "the end is not yet. If Homer Curtis is brought in guilty we shall appeal to a higher court."

"Appeals are not always of any use."

"True!"

"Is there any hope from Judge Hallowell?"

"He is only a figure-head of justice. The jury decides the matter. If it says 'Not guilty,' the judge has no choice but to pronounce sentence."

"If we could only do something!"

Pollard winced under the remark. He had already done 'something'—much, all that human ingenuity could suggest to him. Then he thought of this girl's distress, and his brow cleared.

"We will do our utmost," he assured.

"It is so hard; so hard!"

"Poor child! I understand!"

"Oh! how can I bear it?—how can I? He is innocent!—you and I know that; as innocent as you and I are, Mr. Pollard."

"I believe it, but the proof—"

"How can we get it?—how?"

"I know not," Pollard confessed.

"The web of circumstantial evidence hems him in. Oh! was there anything more cruelly unjust in the world than this same circumstantial evidence? To try a man on what nobody knows; to deprive him of life just because certain occurrences are against him! What is a human life?—what is it that it should be taken so thoughtlessly? Cruel; cruel, indeed, is the curse of circumstantial evidence!"

She wrung her hands and grew so excited that the lawyer became uneasy.

"Remember," he requested, "that the verdict is not yet rendered. Who knows what may not happen in our behalf? Juries often give unexpected verdicts, and we may yet see victory perching on our banner. Be of good courage until all hope is gone."

Mary Wolf sighed. Well did she understand how little to be heeded the encouragement was.

"If only the real slayer could be found!" she murmured, presently.

"He may be," guardedly answered the lawyer.

"Homer Curtis would harm no man. I know him too well to think that for a moment. Oh! sir, it will break my heart if this thing be not stopped."

Albert Pollard moved uneasily. He had a sympathetic nature, which all the rough snocks of his professional life had not driven away, and rarely had he been moved more than by the distress of this young woman. She was the affianced wife of the man under charge of murder, and her devotion was touching. He felt her situation keenly, and all the more so because he not only believed his client innocent, but because he had conceived a genuine respect for the unfortunate man who was on trial for his life.

This talk in the office was one useless in all ways, and the fact was so impressed upon Mary's mind that she did not long take up the lawyer's time.

She arose and went out into the air, and from the office went to her home at once.

The city of New York has many curious dwellers, and virtue and vice go hand in hand among the vast army which lives within the limits of the town. In Mary's home there was a curious mingling of many things. If vice was there she did not furnish it, but this could not be said with any degree of confidence of the only other member of the household.

Those who knew her as the daughter of Ben

Wolf marveled at the difference between the two, and there was cause for it.

She was refined, lady-like and good-hearted. Ben was a grim, rough, unlettered, surly fellow who had no friends, even among those as rough as he. He called himself a 'longshoreman', but, though he owned a boat and often went out in it, he had never been known to do work at his alleged calling. It was generally understood that he picked up odd jobs around the piers, but there were those who hinted that Ben's mode of living would not bear the scrutiny of law.

He had a sobriquet by which he was universally known—that of Briny Ben. To this was often added that of "the Water Wolf."

The two lived in a rude old house close to the North River piers; so close that the panorama of the great stream was always before their gaze if they saw fit to look. There they had lived for many years, while Mary grew to womanhood and, to the wonder of all who knew her, became the woman she was.

To this house she now went. It was not the home-coming that many girls would have had, for she never had known what it was to feel the love and sympathy of a parent—of these things Ben Wolf had no supply.

She admitted herself with her own key and went to the family room. There she had a surprise. She had expected to find no one but her father, and perhaps not him. He was not present, but in his place was a woman she had never seen before.

The latter had an easy-chair and was making herself at home. She did not rise, but sat and looked at Mary with calm unconcern.

She was not pleasant to look upon. She had a face where nature's passions seemed to have struggled unchecked for many years, and a form so lank and bony that her flesh appeared an insufficient preventive to the danger of the bones pricking through.

Soiled and tattered of dress and evil of face, she was not one whom Mary could feel glad to meet there. The latter felt obliged to say something, and did it as graciously as possible.

"Good-evening! Were you waiting for my father?"

"I may be, and I may be not."

It was a reply as surly as Ben Wolf could have made, and Mary was not more favorably impressed.

"I presume you have some business?"

"Maybe."

"I don't understand."

"I didn't expect you would."

Mary looked puzzled and uncertain, and then the visitor broke into a harsh laugh.

"Don't be alarmed," she responded. "I am not insane, and you can take your eyes off from me without fear that I shall eat you up. Since I suppose you are entitled to some explanation, I will say I have been here with Ben Wolf. He is out temporarily, but will soon return. I am not sure I need to wait for him, though."

The last idea was evidently a sudden one, and the woman seemed to find it worthy of more than passing attention. She abruptly rose.

"I'll go," she announced.

Mary did not urge her to remain, and she went out without more ceremony, taking long steps which would have done credit to a man, as far as length was concerned.

Mary gazed after her curiously.

"A peculiar person. I am not sure she is sane, if she did take the trouble to tell me she was."

It was all the notice she gave the visitor, then, for she could not long forget the more serious thoughts she had in mind.

Ben Wolf soon came in.

He was a man of about fifty years, and a good specimen of the athlete. Muscle lurked in every stretch of his big frame, and it was clear he would have been a very bad foe to meet in combat. His ponderous body had no unnecessary flesh, and he moved with the strength of an ox.

His face was bad to an extreme. It was coarse and low, with marks which an honest life never would have left there. Brute though the animal was which he in one way resembled, no ox ever had so much to repulse the beholder as did Ben Wolf in his deeply-lined countenance.

He gave Mary a surly look and then sat down in silence. It was not the fashion for father and daughter to greet each other in any way on such occasions—Mary had learned by experience that he would not answer her—so she said nothing now.

She was thinking of Homer Curtis, and five minutes passed in this way. Suddenly Ben broke forth:

"What fool idea is crawling through your head, now?"

The address was not unusual. It brought no complaint.

"Father," she replied, "you know I told you about Mr. Curtis—"

"I know you did," he retorted, sharply.

"What did I say?"

"Nothing."

"That's right. I said nothin' because I had jest nothin' ter say. I have the same ter say

now. I don't want ter hear any thing about your Mr. Curtis. Ben is a good enough name for me; no frills about it, and no airs. Set!"

"Did he ever do you any harm—"

"He? Wal, I should say not! D'y'e s'pose he could, ef he tried ever so hard? Takes more than such a counter-jumper ter harm old Ben Wolf. Drop him, though; drop him!"

Mary sighed and obeyed.

"You have had company, father," she observed, presently.

"Wal, I don't pay any tax fer it."

The remark was ungracious, but not so much so as usual. Ben seemed to find the fact rather pleasant, and had a sly look of content on his face as if he took much secret pleasure in having had a lady visitor, even if the kind made the term a misnomer in reality.

"Who was she?"

"Who? Wal, ef I's ter tell ye you would know, wouldn't you? But ef ye don't know, it may be because I won't tell."

The Water Wolf chuckled; something very remarkable in his surly career.

"She was a stranger to me; that's all," answered Mary, with genuine indifference.

"Yes, I s'pose so."

Mary did not pursue the subject further, and Ben let it rest. It might have been forgotten by Mary had it not been for something which followed. Ben put on his hat and went out. Mary, left alone, busied herself with her usual duties.

She was thus engaged when she chanced to notice a paper under the chair where the old woman had sat. It was an ordinary-looking paper, and she picked it up because it was offensive to the eye of a neat housekeeper.

Looking to see what it was before she threw it away she stopped short. There was writing on it, and she caught sight of a familiar name.

It was that of Homer Curtis.

Looking further her curiosity was still more aroused. The record, entire, was as follows:

"Homer Curtis, born June 19th, 18—"

Truly, it was unexpected. She had never seen the paper before, and was sure it had not been brought into the house by herself or any of her friends. How, then, had it come there?

Ben Wolf had from the first professed entire indifference to the peril of the accused man, and as he had never seen Homer more than two or three times, and had spoken to him but once, it was not to be supposed he would have the interest to record anything about Homer, even if he had the information necessary to do it.

But the paper was there, and it puzzled Mary not a little.

"It seems impossible that the old woman could have dropped it," the girl mused, "but how else could it have come here? It must have been she, yet what does she know about Homer?"

Another thing impressed her as strange. Whoever had made the record had made it right as to the birth-date of the young man—something exceedingly odd, if it had come from any source but his own hand. The episode was striking, and when the first surprise was over Mary began, naturally, to build upon it.

"If the woman knows so much about him, may she not know more? Is it possible that she may be able to do something to lighten the shadow of our lives? I must see her if it be possible. I'll ask my father more about her, and try to learn where she lives."

The chance was not allowed her that night.

Ben Wolf did not come home while she sat up, and at a late hour she retired, though not to sleep until tired Nature absolutely demanded something of her wearied out brain and body.

Her thoughts were always on one subject:

What could she do for the man accused of murder?

CHAPTER II.

THE JURY'S VERDICT.

THE court-room was filled with people moved, according to the degree of their interest, by painful anxiety, passing curiosity, or the boredom of an idle life. The jury was out in the case of the People *versus* Homer Curtis.

When they returned it would be to pronounce the prisoner guilty or not guilty, and his very existence hung suspended in the balance.

He bore up well under the suspense. He had an air, too, which made him friends. There was no bravado in his way of waiting, but it possessed the composure which told of strong nerves and—did it also indicate a conscience at ease?

No one could tell that but himself.

Mary Wolf was in the court-room, a silent but vitally-interested spectator. How her heart beat with the agony of the suspense! How her own life, and more, seemed at stake, then.

Would the waiting ever end?

To old campaigners in the arena of the law the end was not in doubt. It was regarded as certain that the verdict would be against the prisoner, and that he would die under the heavy heel of circumstantial evidence—the disgrace of modern civilization.

Viewed from the point of such evidence, the web was strong.

It had been told that Homer Curtis and Morris Strong had been partners in business under the firm name of Curtis & Strong, and that until shortly before the murder they had to all appearances been on good terms. But there was ample proof that this good will had been broken.

The evidence submitted ran after this fashion: Morris Heath, a patrolman, testified that on the evening of the murder he was on duty along his beat on West street. He heard a revolver-shot on one of the piers, and, going to investigate, found the lifeless, but still warm, body of a man there who was subsequently proved to be Morris Strong.

Near the body he had found a revolver, which was duly preserved and produced in court.

Timothy Keeler, a longshoreman, who had been nearer the scene when the shot was fired, testified that he had looked that way immediately after the report and had seen a man hurriedly searching for something, it seemed, on the pier. This man had run away almost at once.

James Briggs, a clerk in the establishment of Curtis & Strong, testified to a quarrel between the partners, and was supported in this respect by other clerks; but none could say what the trouble was about.

Angry words had passed between the two in the private office, and it had been current talk during the day that Curtis had threatened his partner, though no one could say in what way, or for what reason.

Moses Silbersky testified that on the day of the quarrel he had sold a revolver to a man whom he identified as Homer Curtis, and the revolver he identified as the one found by the body of Strong after the latter was found dead.

Arthur Stevens, office boy with the partners, testified to moving Curtis's overcoat, while the owner was temporarily absent from the office, and that a revolver had then fallen from the pocket of the garment! He replaced it.

He identified the weapon found by Strong's body as the same he had seen in Curtis's coat.

P. A. Dunne, police sergeant, testified that two hours before the murder Strong had come to the precinct station-house and told him that he had discovered that his partner, Curtis, had been receiving stolen goods and selling them over their counters.

He would not be party to such dishonesty, and had duly given information to the authorities, as seen.

Upon this evidence the Government built their case, claiming that Curtis had been dishonest and a receiver of stolen goods; that Strong had learned of the fact and quarreled with Curtis; that the latter had threatened him if he was exposed; that Curtis then went to the pawnbroker's and bought the revolver; that he met Strong on the pier by engagement or accident, or decoyed him there, and that he then shot Strong, his object being to hide the former crime—that of selling stolen goods.

If there had been any reluctance of the prosecution to go into court with the evidence it would have been dispelled by the fact that, at the last moment, they found three reliable men who swore they had seen Curtis and Strong together near the scene of the tragedy, a few moments before the occurrence, and that both men had been angry and had indulged in talk in keeping with their mood.

What was said none could tell, but they had the impression it was about business matters, and Curtis had been heard to say plainly to his companion:

"If you take this step I will make you repent it to the day of your death!"

They then went away together. Half an hour later Strong was dead.

The defense could not deny any of the testimony introduced, but if Curtis's story was correct its features were to be explained in a way which changed the aspect of all.

He admitted the quarrel with Strong, but avowed that it was Strong, not himself, who had been introducing stolen goods into the store, and that the trouble ensued when he learned of the fact and accused Strong.

He admitted buying the revolver, but explained that fact by alleging that it was done so he could hide in the store by night and entrap the bringers of the illegal goods, Strong having denied his guilt.

As to the threats, he admitted he had declared his purpose to divulge all he knew.

He admitted having been in Strong's company the evening of the murder, and that they had high words, but claimed he had left his partner in good health and then gone to the store and passed the night there, watching for intruders as planned.

He claimed, too, that when he reached the store the revolver was gone from his pocket, and that he supposed he had lost it, or that it had been stolen from his pocket.

He could not prove an *alibi* because he was alone in the store.

It was the claim of the defense that Strong really had been the dishonest partner, and that his motive in going to the police sergeant was simply that of self-preservation; that he had

meanly resolved to make Curtis suffer instead of taking the blame, himself, for handling the stolen goods.

It was their claim, too, that after Strong and Curtis parted, the evening of the murder, the former had gone to the pier and there met the man who was the real assassin. Who this was they did not pretend to know. Possibly it was some stranger who had stolen or found Curtis's revolver, and then dogged Strong and killed him for gain.

Such, in a general way, was the evidence the jury had to sift, and it was the opinion of all that the defense had but a poor case, with the king, Circumstantial Evidence, at the front to rule the hour and decide the fate of a human being.

When the jury filed out the spectators waited with what patience they could for the decision of the twelve.

Mary Wolf was so nervous and weak she could hardly keep any degree of outward composure, or bear up under the strain.

Lawyer Pollard tried in vain to comfort her.

For the most part she kept her own gaze on the face of the judge, for, despite Pollard's assertion that the learned gentleman on the bench was only a "figure-head," she could not help looking upon him as a most important factor in the case.

This man was Otis Hollowell.

He had been an able attorney, himself; so able that it was common talk that he had reached the bench without any of the political influence which, unfortunately, makes so many of the judges of New York.

As a judge he had always been deemed learned, just and impartial, but never in the least sympathetic. No case had ever been before him where he had been outwardly moved by the sorrows of the accused. He had given all a fair chance, but pity—that he eschewed, it seemed.

He was of middle age, and one of unusual happy gifts from Nature.

Tall and well formed, he had a figure of fine symmetry and strength. He had taken on the portliness which usually comes of mature years, but no undue flesh, so his carriage was impressive and worthy of admiration.

His face was of rare power. Broad and firm, it possessed well-shaped features, and about all that goes to make up manly good looks, but it was essentially a face of power.

Men had been heard to say it was the face of a soldier, so much did it express iron will and strength, but this was only partially correct. In a word, it was that of one who was just what Otis Hollowell was—a judge; a ruler on the bench; a man who sat over the destinies of others on the seat of justice.

His gravity, dignity, and a suggestion of severity might, it seemed, have fitted him for position there in the days when more severity and less justice was dealt out to offenders, but he had never been accused of more than a lack of sympathy.

He had sat in the case of Homer Curtis as he sat in all others, unmoved by the struggle for life, but if he was cold as ice, even his worst enemies, or Curtis's most ardent sympathizers, could not say he had been lacking in judicial fairness to the accused.

The long wait ended at last. There was a hum of voices.

"They are coming!"

It was the jury to whom the remarks referred, and they did come into the court-room with slow and ponderous steps.

Eagerly their faces were scanned to learn the result of their deliberations before their lips could tell it.

Judge Hollowell was the only person present who exhibited absolutely no outward interest, and he was in no haste to put the momentous question. He did so at last:

"Gentlemen of the jury, do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

And the foreman replied:

"Guilty!"

Homer Curtis drew a deep, quick breath.

Then he turned his gaze upon Mary.

She had fainted and lay in the arms of the person nearest her, unconscious of all from the moment that fatal word fell upon her hearing.

It was a mercy to her, but it left the prisoner with the sensation of being wholly alone in his crisis.

Many curious eyes were upon him, but he did not blanch. After that one sign—the quick in-drawing of breath—nobody saw the least evidence of emotion. Even his lawyer appeared more disturbed than he. With eyes which wavered not he faced the people and, though free from bravado and defiance, bore himself with great calmness.

"What iron nerves!"

It was the comment of a man who had seen hundreds of persons adjudged guilty at the bar.

Some preliminaries remained. Lawyer Pollard gave notice of an intended appeal, and Judge Hollowell stated he would not pronounce sentence for a few days.

Curtis spoke to Pollard:

"See to Mary. The jailers will care for me!"

CHAPTER III.

A CHIEF AMONG DETECTIVES.

In a plain room in a small, dingy house on Hudson street a man sat by a table, engaged in smoking and thinking. What he thought about it would have been hard to tell from his expression. Whether the subject was grave or gay, his face told nothing.

He was of about fifty years, and time had used him well. True, he was somewhat lean of flesh, and might at first sight have been thought a fit subject for consumption, but further survey would show a good color in his face and ample muscle in his arms and shoulders. No invalid blood was there, but he was of the greyhound order, and fit for any trial of life, thin of flesh though he was.

He wore not the slightest sign of beard, and his brown face was open to every change of expression. Yet, no change was ever depicted there. Long care had made him as much proof against such things as a man of marble.

His name was Claxton.

His occupation was that of a detective.

Among many men he was known as Chief Claxton, on account of the enviable position he held in the ranks of detectives. He was considered a skillful, successful and wily hunter of men; an exceptionally able and prominent member of his profession; and from this came his sobriquet—"Chief" Claxton. To this was often added the appellation of "The Record-Breaker."

A servant appeared to announce a visitor.

"Show him in," was the quiet direction.

The caller came. He was none other than Albert Pollard, the lawyer.

The two had a speaking acquaintance, and duly greeted each other, now, at once.

"I have called on business, Mr. Claxton," remarked Pollard.

"Ah!"

"Have you read of the Curtis murder trial?"

"Somewhat."

"I was the counsel for the defense."

"Indeed!"

"We lost."

"Yes?"

"Unfortunately, we did. I did my best, but the evidence was too strong. We had to succumb, and my client was brought in guilty, and to-day he was sentenced to be hanged at a date too near at hand to give him a feeling at all in the line of comfort."

"I can well believe the last part."

Chief Claxton made the remark calmly, and seemed wholly unmoved. Pollard quickly added:

"I believe my client was innocent, sir."

"The jury seems to have differed with you."

"Unfortunately, they did."

"Juries are perverse."

"Mr. Claxton, I am reluctant to see that young man go out of the world so miserably," cried Pollard, with a sudden outburst. "He is not of the sort of which murderers are made, and I know it. Sir, he's as innocent as I am. More than that, it must be proven, and I am here to engage you to do it!"

"Are you not a bit late in coming? The proper time would have been before he was tried and convicted."

"Another lawyer than I first had the case, and though he did not retain his place more than a week—he was taken ill—he had engaged a detective of good repute and put him on the case. This detective continued with us to the end, but learned nothing. Now, I have come to you. I am well aware that it is a most desperate case, as far as the chances of success go, but you are wise enough to see that if you take a forlorn hope I do not expect everything from you, while I am wise enough to know you will do your best."

"We will see. State the case."

Chief Claxton spoke quietly. He was unmoved by the things of life, be they big or little. Having heard all he meditated.

"If I were a searcher for fame," he remarked, at last, "I should not take this case."

"You do not regard it as hopeful?"

"Considering what you and the other detective have done, it surely is not promising."

"But you will try it?"

"If you wish."

"I certainly do."

"It will do no harm for me to try. I may possibly happen on something others have overlooked."

"When can you begin?"

"At once."

"Do it, sir, and look to me for your pay."

Half an hour later Pollard left the house and walked away. His face bore a more satisfied expression.

"I don't suppose there is any hope," he thought, "but if anybody can bring the truth to light, it is Chief Claxton!"

That same evening Judge Otis Hollowell sat in his private room enjoying his cigar. He was contemplating a certain matter with some interest. It was not in connection with his official duties. That day he had sentenced a young man to be legally executed, but this was not a rare thing in his career, and he hardly thought of the young man since he saw him led away.

Official hours over, he always sunk th "shop," and thought no more about it until he re-entered the court-room the next day.

Now, he was thinking of a new house he was to build, and he was as near enthusiastic as he ever allowed himself to be.

While he was thus occupied the door of his room opened.

He looked around in some surprise, for though he was the father of a charming daughter and the husband of a noble wife, he could not have recalled a case where either had entered his quarters without first rapping on the door.

He expected to see one of them, now, but what he did see was very different.

A woman was there; a woman who was a stranger to him, he thought; and one not a member of his household. Moreover, she was meanly dressed and none too clean, and a person of most forbidding appearance. Had Mary Wolf been there, she would have recognized the same old woman who had come to the Wolf house a few days before, but to Judge Hallowell's mind nothing was conveyed except that a very disagreeable person had in some way obtained access to his premises.

He rose in disgust.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, severely.

"Visiting you!"

Calmly answered the intruder, and she closed the door with all the confidence in the world that it was the beginning of a long interview.

"Why did the servants allow you to come here unannounced?"

"My dear sir, don't blame the Mikes and Bridgets. They had nothing to do with it. I had expected to have a skirmish with them, but the grocer's boy kindly left the door open at the basement with the habit of his kind, and I walked in."

"You can walk out!"

The judge made a move to ring the bell.

"Stop!"

She spoke so commandingly that Hallowell instinctively paused. One moment he gazed; then his face flushed with the anger of being thus addressed in his own house.

"By heavens!" he cried, "You shall not escape after confessing your unauthorized entrance. I will hand you over to the police—"

"Stop!"

His hand was on the button, but she jerked it away before he could ring.

"Summon your hirelings," she added, in a deep, menacing tone, "and all of them shall know of that first wife of yours who never reigned in your house, and but briefly in your heart!"

Judge Hallowell's hand fell. No need then to tell him not to ring—he had the very best of reasons for not touching the bell.

His face had lost some of its iron self-control, and he gazed at his companion in a strange way.

"I think you and I understand each other," she went on. "If we do not, I can assure you a few words will make all as plain as day. Shall we speak of the first Mrs. Hallowell?"

"Woman!" he exclaimed, "you talk wildly. I know not what you mean!"

"No?"

"Assuredly, no."

"Have you forgotten the first Mrs. Hallowell?"

"What Mrs. Hallowell?"

"Your first wife."

"Preposterous! I never had but one."

"Otis, we might go on this way forever, and I might let you lie to me until we grow dumb with age; but I see no use in it. Is it possible you don't know me?"

"Why should I?"

Closely he scanned her face, but saw nothing familiar.

"Because," she slowly replied, "I am Deborah Paine!"

It was a common name, in many respects. Otis Hallowell had sat in judgment when on the bench with many a person before him who had a more patrician cognomen, and never felt the least interest in the name or the person, but the humble combination of words, Deborah Paine, seemed to have special power.

At her assertion his eyes dilated and his firm face lost its firmness. Something like dismay was therein expressed, and he seemed almost to devour her with his earnest regard.

"Deborah Paine," she repeated, calmly.

"Not the Deborah—"

"The same one who was your mother-in-law!"

Judge Hallowell did not dispute it. He recognized her, now, and the consternation on his face proved what the recognition was.

"I thought you dead," he finally muttered, weakly.

"You see I am not,"

"True,"

"For a son-in-law you don't seem glad to see me."

Otis Hallowell was not one to lose his presence of mind a great while over any misfortune, and he now rallied and suddenly confronted the danger. He imagined the case to be one of blackmail, in one sense, and believed he could

get rid of her by using due care and yielding to her in a money way.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"To tell you a bit of news."

"What is it?"

"You to-day sentenced a man to be hanged."

"What of that?"

"Nothing, except that he was your son!"

"My son? Preposterous!"

"I repeat it; he is your son by your first marriage, and you have this day sentenced your own flesh and blood to the gallows!"

CHAPTER IV.

OLD DEBORAH'S REVELATION.

OTIS HALLOWELL felt emotions, as he stood before Deborah Paine, of which he had thought himself incapable. He would have regarded the statement as absurd if any one else had claimed to feel a "curdling" of the blood, yet over him came a sensation as if his own arteries had ceased to be the rivers for the flow of the life-fluid, and with the feeling came a nameless horror.

He found no words to answer, and Deborah went on:

"Homer Curtis is the son of Salome Paine and Otis Hallowell. Yes, most honored judge, the young man you have this day sentenced to the gallows in your judicial capacity is your own son!"

"Woman, you lie!" exclaimed Hallowell.

"I tell the truth."

"The boy died."

"Prove it!"

"Prove he did not!"

"I can."

"I would trust you not; you would lie!"

"Be calm!"

"Be calm? How can I, under the weight of such a villainous assertion?"

"You may be less calm later on."

"I say it is false."

"And you say it because you wish it were so. Judge Hallowell, do you think I am a fool? Would I come to a man of your power, and trust to the chances of getting into jail, if I could not prove all I assert?"

The judge felt fresh oppression upon him.

"You say you can prove it—"

"And I can."

"How?"

"Learned judge, do you remember that when your child was born you regarded it as peculiar that he had inherited a certain birthmark of yours? Do you remember you laughed about it, and said it was like a novel? Do you remember your many jokes about birthmarks—"

"The mark! What was it?"

"A mole-like disfiguration on your arm, and reproduced in exact harmony on the arm of your son."

"Well, well! The proof—"

"Look on the arm of Homer Curtis!"

"He is not here."

"You can go to him."

"What if I don't want to?"

"It is nothing to me."

"Even if it is there," added the judge, growing stronger, "why should I care?"

"You have sent your own son to the gallows!"

The assertion struck home to Hallowell. What if it were true? What if the man was his son, after all?

"Woman, why have you told me this?" he demanded.

"First, because I thought it would worry you; secondly, because I am willing to be paid for keeping the secret."

"Ah! I thought the cloven hoof would show!"

"Paf! Do you suppose I could be other than your foe, under any circumstances? Do you know of any reason why I should come to you as a friend? Don't felicitate yourself on your great brain in finding out my motive. Of course the cloven hoof shows; I don't claim angelic wings or crowns."

"Suppose I refuse to pay you?"

"Then the world shall know the truth; it shall know Curtis is your son. Ay, for I can produce proofs which will be most convincing, learned judge."

"If I pay, you will remain silent?"

"Yes."

"What proof have I of the fact last named?"

"I am not one to kill the goose that lays the golden egg."

"True."

"Our interests will be the same."

"Does Curtis know of this secret?"

"No."

"Does he know of you?"

"No. He was reared apart from his maternal kindred, the same as was the case with the paternal part thereof."

"I should not make terms with you unless I saw the young man's arm and found the birthmark."

"Well said. Go to him, look for the mark, and if you find it not, I'll never ask a penny of you, or worry you further."

Judge Hallowell, feeling fully himself once more, was measuring his opponent. The result was not satisfactory. He could not help believing that Deborah was telling the truth, and the

knowledge did not reassure him. He had no intention of yielding to her, however. He would have scorned the man in his position who would allow himself to be made the victim of blackmail, and he, for one, was not disposed to be a victim.

"Suppose all this is true," he went on, "why should I let you seek hush-money of me? I am not willing to admit a murderer to the list of my children, but if I once let you fasten your grip on my throat, there is no knowing where it will stop. As well scorch the serpent at the start as any time. Why should I pay you blackmail?"

"The notoriety—"

"Can be endured."

"The world will say—"

"Whatever it pleases."

"Your social position—"

"Will not be lost."

"Your present wife and your daughter—"

"Will be safe under the shelter of my name."

Otis Hallowell was growing to be more like the judge on the bench. He met Deborah's gaze firmly, and his manner momentarily grew more stern and icy.

"It is not my fault if Curtis lost all sense of honor and became a candidate for the gallows," he coldly added. "That is his affair. As for me, my record is clean. Salome Payne was my lawful wife. There is not even the error of youth to bring up against me. Where do you find ground for blackmail?"

Deborah smiled. She would have been blind not to see that the judge intended to fight her, and regarded the battle as won already. Now, however, there was as much confidence in her smile as in his cool firmness.

Old, ugly, misshapen and poorly clad though she was, it was clear that Deborah Paine was not a person of weak turn of mind. On the contrary, she united education and native intelligence with steady nerve and unusual cunning.

Unmoved she made her reply:

"I repudiate the term 'blackmail,' learned judge, but if you want to know on what grounds I think I can enforce my claim to your generosity, you shall hear."

"Proceed!"

"The law allows a man but one wife, I believe!"

"I have but one."

"Are you sure?"

"Certainly."

Again the woman smiled.

"Can you prove the death of Salome Paine Hallowell?"

A shade of uneasiness floated across the judge's face.

"Why do you ask such an absurd question?"

"Sir," pronounced Deborah, leaning forward, "my daughter Salome still lives!"

"Absurd!" declared Hallowell, but the troubled look on his face deepened.

"From the hour when she left your house, over twenty years ago, you have not seen her, but where is the proof of her death—"

"Where is the proof that she lives?"

"In a house in this city where she is this moment sitting, awaiting my return!" flashed Deborah.

"Woman, how dare you assert such a thing?"

For the first time a touch of human feeling was in his voice. No longer was it the calm judge who spoke, but the heart of a common man, beset with doubt and fear, echoed in every inflection of his utterance.

Deborah made a gesture of disdain.

"Words, idle words! Why will you deal with them? You and I are both practical persons, or ought to be. Give no heed to my claims that cannot be established by proof, but do not deny what I say until you have tested my veracity. If you doubt that Salome lives, come with me and see. Believe nothing until proven; doubt nothing until my falsity is established. Salome lives: I can show her to you if you'll go with me. Will you do it?"

Otis Hallowell moved uneasily.

"I believed I had proof of her death."

"But you were not sure of it, were you?"

He was silent.

"Come with me and see," she urged.

"Just Heaven! do you assert this as a fact?" suddenly, sharply, cried the judge.

"I do!"

"Salome lives, and—"

"Is your only legal wife?"

Coldly the words were spoken, but they were not by any means received in like spirit. A perspiration broke out on the listener's forehead which was not called there by the temperature of the room.

Suddenly he broke forth fiercely:

"I do not believe you! Woman, you lie!"

"Come and see!"

The judge had been standing. He now wheeled and began to pace the room excitedly. His usual composure was shaken to the utmost, and he could not think with his customary readiness. Deborah watched him with critical eyes—with eyes which had no shade of pity.

Abruptly pausing, at last, he declared:

"I may take you at your offer."

"You would be a fool to do otherwise. A prudent man will take nothing for granted. Why should you? Come with me and see the wife of your youth."

Hallowell shivered.

"Not to-night."

"Choose your own time, only make it soon."

"What are your wishes, in the mean time? As the mother of Salome you may have some claim upon me, I admit. I will give you a small sum of money—"

"Not until you have seen Salome."

"No?"

"No! I will not trade on mere assertions. You must see and be convinced fully. When will you see your first wife—your only wife?"

CHAPTER V.

THE IRON WILL BENDS.

JUDGE HALLOWELL saw the need of well-considered action, and he did not refuse the chance to guard against the future.

"Suppose I meet you at a given point tomorrow night," he suggested. "Let it be almost anywhere except here or—where you say she is."

Deborah did not hesitate over her answer.

"Very well," she returned. "Make the place of meeting where you will. I care not."

"Will the corner of Fifth avenue and Thirtieth street do?"

"Yes."

"And the hour—how about ten of the evening?"

"Very well."

Deborah replied unhesitatingly, and her readiness was not encouraging. To the mind of the judge it indicated that she was sure of her hold, and could afford to waive small details. She had all the ways of a victor sure of triumph.

"Let it be so, then," he added. "Now, is there more to say?"

"Nothing."

"Can you leave here unseen?"

"I ought to be able to do it, with your help."

"Let it be tried."

Hallowell was in a horror of fear lest she should be seen and his interview with her discovered, but in this particular he was not to be tried mentally. He managed to get her out of the house without any one observing them on the way, and then, when she had gone down the street, he returned to his private room. He closed the door and locked it. He was alone—alone with the new discoveries.

In the center of the apartment he paused.

His figure grew statue-like, and his gaze became fixed upon vacancy. He looked, yet saw nothing of what was before him. Instead, he saw the present and the future—saw them, and his blood seemed cold in his veins.

"Just Heaven!" he murmured. "What is this I have encountered?—what curse has come upon me?"

He pressed his hand to his brow. It was hard to grasp all of the horrible truth.

"Salome alive!" he added huskily; "my first wife still living? Then what is Mirabel?"

It was the name of the true woman who had so long presided over his home, and the mother of his daughter; the woman he had delighted to introduce to all as his wife through the many years he had been engaged in climbing to his honored position in the legal profession.

"What is Mirabel?" he pursued; "my God! what?"

A groan broke from his hot lips. He saw his daughter and her mother as clearly as if they were then before him, and the sight was one of horror. Good, refined, womanly and all that their sex could demand, they were dear to him; dearer than he had ever suspected until that moment. Much of his sternness had gone into his family life, though he had never been harsh or thoughtless of their good, but at that time all they had been to him flashed upon him.

His heart was awakened, and with the awakening came feelings too deep for utterance.

"If this be true," he exclaimed, "would to Heaven I had died before they ever saw me!"

If it was true! Deborah was gone, and with her going had gone much of the influence her candid way of speaking had aroused.

"It cannot be true! Why should an old hand like me be influenced by the tales of a miserable old woman, which cannot be proven in any way? Proven! I will not believe it! Deborah Paine lied; I know she did. All this is too romantic to be true. She lied; she lied!"

He tried to convince himself of it by reiteration, but the task was not so easy as he would have had it. Deborah had refused to take any money until she had established the truth of her claim. That was not the way of a falsifier.

"Salome alive! What madness rules this hour? What fiend of discord and malice has entered my happy life? Alive! It is false, and I will prove it so. She cannot have survived—no; nor the boy, either."

His thoughts turned to Homer Curtis.

In the rush of events he had given but little thought, before, to the son he had, if Deborah was to be believed. Now, this matter had its part.

"If he is what she claims, I have this day sentenced my own son to death!"

The thought caused him to grow pale. Had there been no other evidence he would not for a moment have considered the remarkable possibility that Homer Curtis could hold that relationship to him, but it came now with telling force.

For some time he paced the room, meditating at first with confusion and doubt, and with but little method, but, presently, he grew calmer.

"If Salome lives, the boy may have survived, too. All things are possible. Is there any evidence in the young man to that effect?"

Deliberately he recalled the personal appearance of Salome Paine, and compared each peculiarity with the facial marks of Homer Curtis. He had sat on the case with but little of feeling for the prisoner, and had not regarded his looks as a more sympathetic judge might have done. Now he had to recall each feature by itself.

He finally shook his head.

"I fail to see that he resembles Salome. How about myself?"

It was a still more difficult question to answer, and he made but little headway at it.

"About the only thing I can recall clearly is that he had remarkable nerve all through the trial."

He stopped short. He had not gone thus far through life without his own peculiarities having been brought to his notice. He knew he had the reputation of having an iron will, and the power to meet all the trials of life with marble calmness.

And now the fact that Homer Curtis had so borne up under his awful trial so well was impressive.

The prisoner was educated and refined. He had not one iota of the man of low life, and had shown none of the bravado which the ignorant mistake for courage. Calmly he had sat through the trial, unmoved as to outward show by his peril, yet, like an intelligent man, keenly alive to it in point of fact, of course.

What a similarity to the iron judge!

Otis Hallowell recognized the duplicated picture.

"My God! what if it should be so?"

After pondering awhile on the possibility he went to the glass and looked long and earnestly at the face there reflected. Was there aught therein to remind him or any one else of Homer Curtis?

"Children usually look like one or the other parent. I see nothing, now, to prove the possibility of the case. But Deborah bade me look for the birthmark. That is the true line for proof or disproof. It must be seen to, but how?"

Again he paced the room. He had great influence at the Tombs, where Curtis was confined. The warden owed him debts of gratitude on a large and numerous scale. At a word from him the warden would undoubtedly have examination made, but he dared not authorize such an examination.

It would, perhaps, put him in the power of another person, or set of persons.

"I, alone, can do it. But how, and when?"

Again he thought. Finally he exclaimed:

"There is no time like the present."

He looked at the clock.

"It is so late the Tombs will be quiet, now, and I think the warden will still be present. I'll go down, anyhow."

He went to the closet and took out garments, but not the elegant ones he usually wore. Instead, he selected a very rough coat and a slouched hat—an outfit he had not worn since a fall trip to the Adirondacks with gun and dogs, some years before.

Leaving the house he walked two blocks and then called a cab, engaged it and went on his way. He arrived at the Tombs without adventure, and was soon in the presence of the warden.

That official was very much surprised to see him, but he was welcomed with the warmth and attention which the creature gives the master. The warden had not forgotten that political influence, with Hallowell at the front, had obtained for him his remunerative position.

Neither had the judge.

"I've come on business, Mr. Warden," he announced, at last.

"Indeed, sir?"

"I helped you once."

"You did, judge, and I am very grateful—"

"I want your help, now."

"Mine? Bless you, sir, I shall be glad to give it, if it will be any help, really. What can I do, judge?"

"I want to enter the cell of Homer Curtis, the condemned murderer."

"You—do!"

The warden almost gasped the words, so surprised was he.

"Yes. Is there any rule against it?"

"Why, not for you, judge, of course!" cried the official, without stopping to think what the rule really was in such cases. "Of course such things don't include you," he repeated.

"Can you get me in without any keeper or watchman seeing me?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you will never let anybody know of my visit?"

"Never, sir; never!"

"Do you think Curtis will be asleep?"

"Probably. He never yet has failed to put in a full night. Wonderful nerve that man has, sir; wonderful!"

"Go and see if he really is asleep."

"Gladly, judge."

"Mind you, not a word to any one!"

"Not a whisper, sir."

The warden hastened away, and Hallowell rose and slowly paced the room, his brow stern and thoughtful.

"I may miss it by making a confidant of this man, but he is a willing slave, now, and will be as long as he can hold his office, or I be useful to him in any way. It's all right, I think."

The warden returned and reported that Curtis was asleep, and that the way was clear for the judge to do whatever he wished. Hallowell made known his plan.

"You will please admit me to the cell, and then you will retire to a certain point I will indicate when we are in the murderers' row. At said point you will please stand and keep watch until I come out."

"All shall be done as you say, judge."

"Lead on!"

They left the room and walked along the dismal way to "murderers' row." Hallowell shivered. He was developing remarkable sensibilities and weakness for one of his old character, but he was learning the lesson which many a man had learned before him: that trouble dissolves the iron of the will and brings better, if weaker, qualities to the front.

There was nobody to interfere with the plan, and the warden soon paused by the door of a certain cell. He unlocked the door.

"Go in!" he whispered.

Quietly Hallowell indicated the point where his ally was to stand and wait, and then he took the light and, himself, passed within the narrow cell.

On the bed a single figure lay in motionless oblivion, the deep breathing indicating slumber so profound and healthful that many a man in his own home might have envied the sleep of rest.

It was Homer Curtis.

He lay where the judge had an excellent view of his face, and he paused to look.

It was one of manly good looks, and one of power, too. The broad jaws told of will beyond the common, and Hallowell could not help being impressed. He noted, too, the fine brow and well-shaped features, and the conviction might have dawned upon a less moved observer that the face as a whole was a fine one.

But Otis Hallowell searched no more. Was there aught in the face to recall Salome Paine or himself? He could not tell, and though deeply affected he gave it up suddenly as he remembered the more important business.

The condemned man lay just right for the examination which the visitor wished to make.

The arm of interest was well upturned, and the loose night-dress made it easy to get at it if the prisoner did not awaken. Setting down the light, Hallowell made the attempt. He pushed the sleeve of the garment back and sought for the alleged mark.

The mark was there!

Clearly defined on the smooth, white skin, the sought-for, but unwanted, brand of Nature was revealed to the eager eyes.

Deborah's claim was thus far proven true.

"Just Heaven!"

Otis Hallowell breathed the words in a sort of panic. Over twenty years had passed since he had seen the birthmark on his infant son's arm, but its counterpart on his own person had never vanished, and both were well remembered.

"It is true!"

The great judge whispered the admission huskily, and his eyes grew large and full of something akin to terror.

"He is my son, and it was I who sentenced him to death on the gallows!"

Great beads of perspiration stood on the speaker's forehead, and he gazed down at the sleeper in mute horror for several minutes. Just then he thought of only one thing—that he had sentenced his own son.

It was an awful knowledge.

The moments wore on, but he stirred not. His expression was fixed and marble-like—a look of horror and dismay. Was it, indeed, his own flesh and blood which lay there, condemned to a violent and disgraceful death? How the judge's thoughts ran riot, then; how he swept the whole horizon of past, present and future without obtaining clear view of anything!

He did not stop to think that his marriage with Salome Paine had been anything but happy, for he was not callous enough to let such a consideration weigh for a moment.

If this unhappy wretch was his son, his son he was in spite of the allied powers of unhappiness, discord and crime.

Once he lowered his hand as if to touch the brow of the sleeper, but his own movement recalled him to a recollection of the situation of

the hour. Homer Curtis must not awaken and find him there.

Sighing deeply he replaced the disturbed night-robe, and then turned and walked from the cell.

The warden came forward and relocked the door without intruding his ideas or commonplace upon the distinguished visitor. Then they went back to the office. Hallowell faced his companion, pale, but calm as ever.

"I am obliged for your help, sir," said the judge. "I wanted to satisfy myself on one point. Kindly remember you are not to mention this to anybody. Here is a slight gift for your youngest child."

He slipped a generous sized bank-note into the hand of the warden, and his night's labor was over. He was soon in the cab and homeward bound.

"What now?" he muttered, gloomily. "I am face to face with the fact that Deborah told the truth. How does this place Curtis and myself—how place Mirabel and Alice? Just Heaven! how does it place us all?"

CHAPTER VI.

AMONG RIVER-THIEVES.

CHIEF CLAXTON had not been idle since he was engaged to take up Homer Curtis's case, but when, after some days' delay from the time of the ending of the trial by jury, the prisoner was brought up to be sentenced, the detective could not say he had any explanation to offer which would acquit him.

Claxton had talked with the prisoner, himself, and with all who were interested in the case, but what he had learned had not helped to a solution of the mystery.

He had looked closely into the past life of Morris Strong, the murdered partner. He had found nothing there to give him a suggestion. As far as was known, Strong had had no enemies. He had been a devoted attender to business; indeed, he was a sort of fanatic on the subject, his unusual devotion to such things arising from an inordinate love of money. He gave all his time to the making of it, and saved what he made with the zeal of a miser.

His penuriousness, however, did not seem to furnish any reason for his violent end, for he never carried so much money about with him as the majority of men did.

Finding all hopes in that direction cut off, Chief Claxton outlined his views to Lawyer Pollard.

"Somebody received stolen property."

"Yes," Pollard admitted.

"Goods were brought to the store and sold which were never paid for by the partners."

"Yes."

"Curtis declares it was Strong who brought them, while Strong told exactly the opposite story to the sergeant of police."

"True."

"Somebody lied, and we are bound to believe it was not Curtis."

"I do believe it."

"Well, let us first prove it was not Curtis, anyhow. Prove that, and we remove the motive, in part, for him to kill Strong."

"Yes."

"To prove it we must find whence came the stolen goods, and who brought them to the store. Clearly, it was an ally of the dishonest partner. Now, their store is near the river. I believe the goods were brought by water, and upon that line of belief I shall work."

"Good! Go in!"

This was all that Chief Claxton told Pollard, then, but he had a theory which was in keeping with his remarks which he did not care to share with even the lawyer at that time.

He went about the business with care. Before the day on which Curtis was sentenced he had learned that various warehouses and stores near the water front had lost goods, and that vessels, there, had fared the same.

Whether the property had gone into Curtis & Strong's store was not certain, and the robberies might, as far as was known, have been the work of river-thieves who had sold elsewhere.

Among those who were deeply interested in the outcome of the affair, was a young man named Edward Acton.

He and Curtis had been friends for many years, and when the latter was arrested he had given Homer his full sympathy and help. He had worked in the cause, and was one of the few who had kept faith in the prisoner's innocence through all. He was one, too, whom Chief Claxton consulted when he took the case, and events proved that he made an impression on the somewhat saturnine detective.

Early in the same evening when Judge Hallowell was having his singular experience, Claxton called on Acton at his room.

After some commonplace conversation the detective suddenly but quietly asked:

"Do you want to go out with me to-night?"

"Certainly. Where?"

"To look for river-thieves!"

"Ah!"

"Why do you start?"

"I can easily see that you are working on the case of deepest interest."

"What I said does not necessarily imply that, yet such is the case. I have been busy along the water-front. You know my theory that the goods sold in Curtis & Strong's store were brought by water. I think I have a bit more."

"What is it?"

"Patient and secret inquiry along the piers has developed the fact that various persons have seen two men about in a boat in a way which smacks of just the line of business I have had in mind. I can't say they are river-thieves, but I think they are. I want to know."

"And I am to go with you? Well, this is unexpected good luck!"

"Do you know what river-thieves are?"

"Desperate men."

"Yes, and men who would shoot us as quick as they would a mad-dog, if their safety demanded it."

"It is not idle boasting when I say I am not afraid of them."

"Good! I did not think you would be, or you would not have heard of the project. When I formed the plan I realized that I needed some one to help me, and you occurred to me. You are young, strong, brave and devoted to Curtis. That's why you are to go with me."

"I thank you for your good opinion, but, as far as I can say, it is not over-stated. I shall be very much pleased to try the adventure with you."

"Then put on the roughest suit of clothes you can command."

"I am with you. I think you must have a definite plan."

"I have, for I to-day learned that a firm doing business up the river a bit, near Fourteenth street, had discovered that some knave had made preparations, unless signs go for nothing, to make a break, there. Several of the places already robbed—and among those which, I have learned positively, unwillingly furnished goods for the illegal sale at Curtis & Strong's—have been robbed in just the same way."

"That's cheering!"

"If we can nab these fellows, and get them to confess that they delivered the goods, not to Curtis, but to Strong, we shall be on the high road to success."

Edward Acton, busy with his dressing, thought he was in good luck to have so impressed a wily detective as to be given his confidence so fully.

It sometimes happens that we do not know so much about matters as we think we do.

It was so with Mr. Acton.

Yet, Claxton was not deceiving him in the least, and he was sincere in requesting his help. He suspected there would be some warm work if the river thieves were sighted, and wanted to be able to cope with them. He knew of no better aid than one so devoted to Curtis, and had divulged as much as he had, simply because it would do no harm, and seemed only justice to Acton.

The latter was soon ready for the street. Both he and Claxton certainly looked rough enough to hide their real characters.

The detective led the way, and they worked around to the point they were to watch without advertising their movements to any one about the vicinity where stood the store which they expected would be raided that night.

It was a large building in a lonely spot, and the shadow of the walls made an admirable cover for them to keep out of sight while they awaited the turn of events.

Hours wore away.

"They may not be coming," suggested Acton. "I think they will. I wish I was as sure they will be the particular thieves we want."

"It seems almost impossible."

"I have told you my reasons for hope."

"They seem small to me, but you know best."

"Those in my calling must necessarily build on little or nothing, in many cases. I think we need not cavil at the start here."

"What are we to do if they come?"

"That I cannot tell until the time comes. You will keep near me and be ready to obey my directions without comment, as far as possible. Perhaps," Claxton added, thoughtfully, "I may go with them in their boat, after the robbery."

"Go with them!" echoed Acton.

"That is one way—go secretly, of course I mean."

"But if you are found by them—"

"It will be the fate of war. Hist! is not that the sound of oars?"

Oars certainly were sweeping the river, though that did not indicate anything of value in itself. Other people rowed on the old North stream. The regular dip of the blades was still heard, and Chief Claxton, using his eyes to the utmost, saw the shadow of a craft appear in the darkness.

Slower grew the stroke of the rowers, and the craft approached with what seemed to be great caution.

"Something to conceal!" murmured the detective.

"Do you think it is they?" eagerly asked Acton.

"We shall see."

The boat had been put in the grasp of the tide, and it was now allowed to drift. It bore down on the pier and finally touched. Chief Claxton turned to his companion.

"Set it down as fact that we are on the trail of something," he whispered. "We will see what."

Acton found the excitement of the moment telling upon him. He was not accustomed to such events, and when he reflected that this might be the first step toward the establishing of Homer Curtis's innocence, he found it necessary to put a check on his nerves.

The boat had disappeared, but there was not a very long lull. The head of a man showed above the edge of the pier, and was followed by the remainder of his person. He came up as if out of the ocean, and stood erect.

For some time he did not move. Then he crept along the pier with slow and stealthy steps and approached the building.

He began to make a circuit thereof. Before he could put them in danger of discovery the two men had retreated, and he found nothing to alarm him.

He went back to the edge of the pier, and another man speedily appeared by his side.

"We have found river pirates," remarked Claxton, calmly. "Whether they are of any real value to us remains to be seen. Don't build too much on them. Thieves are numerous along the water-front. Don't hope too strongly."

The watermen approached the spot once more.

"Silent is the word," cautioned Claxton. "Be prudent and watch. Ah! they go straight to the weak spot we discovered early to-day. They plan to enter."

"Can it be these men hold secrets valuable to Homer Curtis?"

"My word for it," the detective replied, "we will find out!"

CHAPTER VII.

CHIEF CLAXTON'S GREAT RISK.

"THEY are in the building!"

The detective made the announcement with all the coolness in the world. Experience had given him the hardened nerves which brought a matter-of-fact air which Edward Acton tried in vain to copy.

"Isn't it time to seize them?" asked the latter, eagerly.

"Hardly! I would not interrupt them now for the world. We are making history, and seeking old history. Let them work. As for us, I will have a look at their boat. Come!"

The supposed river thieves were wholly inside the building, now, and there was not much danger of discovery. Chief Claxton and his companion freely crossed the pier and soon stood by the boat.

Acton could see nothing about it to mark a difference from the ordinary craft, but the detective evidently did not intend to let anything escape his net. He lowered himself to the boat.

It was a fine craft, and of considerable size. On the bottom was a quantity of burlap, and it was not hard to see this was to be used in covering up whatever came to the hands of the thieves.

Nothing more was to be observed, yet Claxton stood so long idle that Acton grew impatient.

Finally the leader ascended.

"I am going in the boat," he announced, quietly.

"Do you mean it?" demanded Acton, surprised.

"Yes."

"It will be perilous."

"If they find me and can work their will it will be death," coolly agreed Chief Claxton. "All these chances I must take, but I trust I shall score a triumph."

"How can you possibly escape discovery?"

"I have been studying on that. Observe that there is the best of chance for me to hide under the pier until the are on board. After that all depends on luck. When they have brought out their plunder and put it in the boat my chance will come, if ever. They will spread the burlaps over the stolen goods. When they turn to their oars I shall make a break to get in, too, and hide under the coverings."

"Surely, you cannot do it."

"I can surely try."

"And if you fail?"

"I shall call to you and we will seize them right here."

Such was the plan Claxton had formed, and he did not waver in his determination. Acton was very reluctant to be thrown out of the case at a time when his ally would be in the most peril, but he was not leader there.

The detective held to the idea.

He secreted himself under the pier, and Edward then returned to the vicinity of the building. The thieves seemed to be still at work, but they did their job well. Except for an occasional gleam of light, as if from a dark lantern, there was nothing to tell of their operations.

Time passed.

Then they emerged.

Acton felt nervous, but he had to let events take their course. He saw that the thieves were well laden with the spoils of their raid, and could well believe they were in exultant

frame of mind. How much his situation differed from theirs, with the restraint which was upon him and the possibility of being left out of the competition!

Down the pier they went, their movements now quick and nervous.

Reaching the vicinity of the boat they promptly lowered their burden and themselves followed.

Claxton had cautioned Edward not to approach too close, but even this was hardly enough to restrain the latter's impatience. How he longed to be something more than a figure-head at that moment! He almost hoped Claxton's plans would miscarry.

For awhile he could hear the thieves busy with their arrangements; then the oars dipped again and the boat receded.

"All is lost!"

Edward muttered the words in a fever of disappointment, but they meant no more than that he realized he was out of the race. It looked as if Claxton had so far succeeded that he was a passenger on the boat—a most hazardous victory, surely.

The boat continued to move away until the shadows of night swallowed it up and Acton had the scene all to himself.

His first step was to go to the edge of the pier and make sure he had, indeed, lost his late companion, but Claxton was not there, and the only inference was that he had gone as a passenger.

"Magnificent nerve!" Acton muttered, "but was it good judgment? He is one man with desperate criminals; men who would shoot him without remorse if they found him, and I don't see how he is to make the voyage undetected. It is a stupendous risk; a mere trifling with the life given by the Almighty Giver. It looks to me as if he is doomed!"

The object of these melancholy forebodings was at that moment lying in the boat under a covering of burlaps. He had been successful in entering the craft and covering himself from view, and when the thieves pulled away he went too.

It was no new thing for Chief Claxton to be in peril, and if this risk was greater than some others, he endured the thought without particular emotion.

The thieves knew the way, and knew their business. They did not long linger where they could be noticed from the several piers, but worked out into the river and then pulled strongly but coolly down the stream.

The course was in keeping with the hopes of the lone passenger, and he took courage accordingly.

After a long while the boatmen began to talk, and Claxton strained his powers of hearing to catch the faintest clue.

"Another job well done!" was the satisfied comment.

"Yes," growled the second man.

"You must be a mascot."

"Durn it! I'm a man o' brains!" was the modest rejoinder.

"Admitted, but don't you think you're lucky, too?"

"Not a bit; it's brains. There ain't no sech thing as luck."

"Possibly you are right."

"Sartain I be."

"If we land this cargo, we shall be a good bit the richer."

"Right, my covey!"

"It means a good time with the boys for several moons."

"Dunk, you're a fool! My advice is that you quit spendin' money in riotous livin' an' settle down ter biz. You hev a chance ter make a pile an' then retire an' live like a lord the rest o' yer days."

"Old man, you must never have been young. You don't know what it is to clink the glasses over the bar and see youth and pleasure rule the hour. Young bloods will be young bloods, and don't you forget it."

"They'll be fools, ye mean."

"There's something in that, but this you can mark down: While the wine flows red and the girls develop maddening beauty, young blood will run warm."

"And brains run thin!"

"Have it as you will, old man, but I'm still young and I mean to get my fill of life."

"Oh! the eyes of my love are as bright as the stars, And her radiant smile is the sun of my life; Oh! the taste of the wine is a joy to the lip, And its touch is a balm to the heart torn with strife;

So I'll fill up my soul with the glory of each, And sing to the luck which has put them in reach!"

He who had been called "Dunk" sung the lines in a mellow voice, but with utterance so low that even his captious companion did not try to stop him. But then the skeptic growled:

"Yes, an' you'll be sorry some time. That's your hunt, though; not mine. Have your way, boy, but remember you're sweet on my daughter."

"Remember it! Can I forget it even when asleep? Not much, for she's the inspiration of my life, by Jove!"

"Drop talk. Attend to business."

Thus curtly squelched, Dunk relapsed into silence, and the boat went on in its former quiet way.

Chief Claxton was not learning much, but he treasured up the one name he had heard and prepared for the future. Unconscious of the fact that their secrets were in such vital danger the thieves rowed on. After awhile their manner grew more wary and they turned toward the New York shore.

The night favored them in one way, it being so thick with fog that they were not observable more than a few fathoms away, and the only real danger, now they seemed likely to escape police boats, was in the landing.

They drew near a dock with slow and steady strokes.

The craft glided in and finally touched the pier.

It was the work of only a moment to make it fast, and then they made their way to the upper part of the structure. This was done, as Claxton easily understood, to look to the chances of their being seen by any foe, but it worked more against than for them.

No sooner had they taken themselves out of the way than the detective quietly dropped over the side of the boat into the water.

He was a good swimmer, and he soon gained the support of one of the big timbers and, still underneath, waited for renewal of action.

The thieves shortly hastened back.

"Now for action!" ordered the surly man.

The craft was pushed entirely under the pier, and then Claxton saw for the first time that there was some sort of a structure beyond. This developed into a box-like concern at the street end of the pier, and he quickly perceived that it was a regular storehouse for the thieves.

It did not take long to put away all they had, and they then put the craft back in its former position, removed the oars to a safe hiding-place and climbed once more to the top of the pier.

The scene on water was over, but Chief Claxton was not by any means ready to arrest them. He could not tell what the next few minutes would bring forth, but it was his opinion that he would not arrest them at all.

He believed they would serve him better free than in prison.

Leaving the vicinity of the river they crossed West street and walked off.

Seen by gaslight, they were revealed to the detective as a young man and one of middle age. The latter was a big, stout, slouching fellow, but his ally was of trim proportions and would have been rather dashing had it not been for the coarse clothes he wore.

They soon passed a policeman, and Claxton noticed the latter look after them and shake his head. The officer was known to Claxton, and the detective made haste to address him:

"Who are those men?"

"The big fellow I don't know; the other is Duncan Davies, a sport. He plays the races and handles the cards. He claims to be square, but I've noticed he is around a good deal, lately, with old clothes in place of the natty suits he wears usually. Strikes me as peculiar—"

The patrolman had more to say, but Claxton could not afford to lose sight of his game. He walked on, and went where the river thieves went. One of them he knew by name; the other he hoped to know before he was done with them for the night.

They did not long keep in the course they had at first taken, but bore around and worked to the quarter near the river. They at last passed by a plain old house, and the big man produced a key and opened the door.

Both entered.

Just at the last moment the big man had nodded to a small boy who was passing, and Claxton thought he saw chance again working in his behalf.

"Boy," he pleasantly asked, "was that man you spoke to Peter Wing?"

"Naw," replied the young citizen. "That was Briny Ben."

"Briny Ben! That's an odd name."

"Oh! his name is Ben Wolf, but we all call him Briny Ben. He's a waterman, you see."

"Oh! Lives there, I take it?"

"Why, cert."

"He isn't the one I want, unless he's connected with the Miffin Mission."

"Him? Wal, I guess Briny Ben ain't, b'thunder! Mission! Great Scott! I should smile ter see him in sech business. Naw; you kin set et down ez fact that your mission man ain't him!"

The boy walked on without explaining why he was so sure, but leaving the impression that he regarded Ben as a hard citizen.

"I am glad to know Briny Ben," murmured Chief Claxton.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAIR OF THE WOLF.

THE detective had been in the Wolf house before, one of his interviews with Mary Wolf having been there, but he had not chanced to meet Ben, and did not know anything about the waterman. Matters were now put on a footing where Ben became of as much interest as his pretty daughter.

If Chief Claxton had found the right batch of river thieves he had found more at the same time. As he had said to Edward Acton he believed one of the first steps should be to discover and make them confess that it was to Strong, not to Curtis, they had sold the stolen goods, and now he thought a step had been taken toward the accomplishment of a clearing up of the mystery.

He had to confess that the first discovery did not work well, if surface signs were to be considered.

Curtis was Mary's lover, and Ben Wolf was her father. Did it not look, therefore, as if the two had been in league, and that it was to Curtis that Ben had sold the stolen goods?

There was chance to learn something more about Briny Ben near by, no doubt, but Claxton took a different way. He had told Edward Acton to go directly home in case he, himself, succeeded in going off in the thieves' boat, and to that point the detective now went.

Acton had reached there ahead of him, and was much relieved when Claxton appeared well and safe.

He begged to hear the story, but was not gratified at once.

"One moment," requested the wily detective. "I have been thinking about another matter, as I came up. You know you introduced me to the betrothed of your friend Curtis, Miss Wolf. She impressed me as being a fine girl. In case things go wrong with Curtis, she will have a hard row to hoe. I trust she has good friends?"

"She has a father, but—"

"Ah! then she is all right."

"Not with that old scoundrel!" declared Edward, with force. "Why, he is no more a father to her, let the tie of blood be ever so true, than a veritable wolf would be. All right with him? Not much, for Ben Wolf is a scoundrel!"

"You put it strongly."

"I do, for I know him well. He is a surly brute who has never given that poor child one atom of fatherly love. He and she are as much apart as if the mountains of the Andes separated them. He hated Homer, too," added the speaker, thoughtfully, "and my friend was barred out of the house. Why he did hate him I know not, unless it was because Mary liked him. That was enough to make Ben hate any one."

"He must have some redeeming quality, I suppose?"

"Then you suppose wrong. Ben has a bad name. He calls himself a 'longshoreman,' but never works at his trade. Instead, he does work on the water which may be honest, but I have my doubts."

"Can it be he is a river thief?"

Thus far Edward had spoken with the headlong haste of indignation, but there was now something in Claxton's voice which made him stop abruptly.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Simply that Ben Wolf was one of the men we dealt with to-night."

"At the pier?"

"Yes."

"I am not surprised— But what aspect does this give our case?" Edward abruptly asked.

"Well, if, as I hoped, we were on the track of the men who sold illegal goods to one of the partners of Curtis & Strong, it seems to give it an important aspect."

"Do you think it is possible?"

"We have to-night proven Briny Ben a river thief. Why should he not be as likely to be our man as any other?"

"If so, it is a strange state of affairs. I did not think to find the surly Water Wolf mixed up in it. Tell me all, Claxton."

The detective had nothing to keep back, and the story was soon told.

"I know Duncan Davies by reputation," declared Acton. "He is an unwanted lover of Mary Wolf's, but he has her father's approval. Davies is well known on the race-track, and is a card-sharp. He claims to be square. You can judge how much there is in it, after what you have seen to-night."

"Yes."

"What will you do?—arrest them?"

"Not by any means; not now. The plan is to wait and watch. Acton, if you prove false to the trust I have reposed in you, and betray the events of this night to any one, even to Mary Wolf, your friend Curtis will hang!"

Claxton spoke in a deep and impressive voice, and Edward hastened to reply:

"If I betray the trust, may I hang, myself!"

"That is well said, and I think you realize the importance of silence and endless care."

Acton was anxious to know all about the plans of the detective, but the fact that the latter had taken him into his confidence in a measure did not necessarily indicate that he intended to tell all his secrets. If Claxton suspected more than was plain to Acton, or if he had any well-defined plan in mind, he did not make the fact known.

After a discussion to the length which the leader thought advisable he took his departure.

Claxton was eating his supper the next night,

when he had a note from Acton. It bade him come to the house when he had leisure.

Acton held a small slip of paper.

"I have here," he remarked, "a bit of material which has been sent me by Mary Wolf. It has been in her possession for over a week, but in the worry she has had over Homer's case it has been forgotten until now. Read it and see if it is of value."

Claxton read:

"Homer Curtis, born June 19th, 18—."

He looked up and asked:

"What is this?"

"A paper which came into Mary's hands in a peculiar way; a paper which may mean nothing, or may mean much. Mary found it in her own home. She is not sure how it came there, but she believes it may have been dropped by a mysterious old woman who had visited her father. If such was the case, the questions arise: Why should the old woman have had such a record? how did she, or the writer, whoever it may have been, know when Homer was born? and how happened it to be brought to Briny Ben's house?"

"Able argued, as far as I can see," dryly remarked Claxton, "but if you will explain further I shall be able to grapple with the questions more intelligently."

Acton told of the visit of the bony old woman to the Wolf house, and her peculiar and unsatisfactory conversation with Mary, as related in the opening pages of this chronicle, and then explained in detail how the present paper had been found.

When all was told, the detective sat holding the paper and looking at it as if he hoped it would answer for itself and tell what it really meant.

"Ben Wolf certainly would not have such a document," added Acton, "and it follows that the woman must have brought and lost it."

"Yes."

Claxton assented without seeming to know what he said.

"You say Mary is still unaware of the identity of the old woman?" the detective presently added.

"Yes."

"It might be well to learn who the woman is."

"Emphatically, yes: I should say so."

"I will run down and see Miss Wolf."

Claxton put the paper away and soon left the house.

"I am disappointed; he does not seem to see much in it," thought Acton.

Whatever Claxton thought he made no confidant, but his manner was as calm as ever as he wended his way to the Wolf house. He did not once look at the paper, or seem unusually meditative.

Reaching the house, he was about to ring when the door opened in his face and Mary came out, equipped for the street. Her face lighted up at sight of him.

"I wanted to see you!" she exclaimed, gladly.

"Did you? Well, I am here."

"Have you received the paper I sent?"

"It is in my pocket, now."

"And the woman is in the house?"

"Eh?"

"The old woman who, I think, dropped it, is in there with my father at this minute."

"This is interesting," murmured Claxton, but his manner did not indicate that he felt any interest, himself. "Pray, what is being done?"

"I don't know. I had been out, and when I came in I found her there. Neither she nor my father saw me, so I crept quietly away, and was about to come to you in person, little as I could hope you would arrive in season to do any good—that is, to see her."

"Well, since she is there now, I don't see why I can't see her," remarked the detective, calmly.

"I will go in. I am accustomed to such matters, and if you will indicate some favorable point of view I will ask you to keep well back while I try my luck at listening."

Chief Claxton seemed to be taking his time with his remarks, but, somehow, he said a good deal in a short time, and in a manner which made Mary obey without the loss of a moment. She led him to a place where he could act the listener under favorable circumstances, if anywhere, and then left him alone.

Ben Wolf and Deborah Paine were seated close together, but not engaged in conversation when Claxton gained view of them. They sat silent, and, as the detective perceived after a long while of the silence, in a mood not exactly amiable.

Briny Ben's face bore a sullen expression, while Deborah looked determined and grim. It was Ben who first broke the pause.

"Ef anybody thinks they kin monkey with me they are a good bit out o' their latitude!" he growled.

"Nobody is doing anything of the sort."

"Wal, I don't like the looks."

"I never knew anything you did like, Ben Wolf!" she retorted. "You are a confirmed kicker, and when you have the least cause you kick the hardest. Why will you be so foolish?"

"I can't see why no money ain't comin'."

"I have told you the time is not ripe. What

more do you want? I am managing this case shrewdly, if I do say it, and I'm not going to hasten matters and ruin all for the sake of comforting your small soul."

"Durn it! I believe you're playin' it on me."

"You are a fool, Ben Wolf!"

"Fair speech, old woman, or you'll be sorry."

Why, I'd as soon put you out o' the world—"

"And kill the goose that is to lay the golden egg."

Briny Ben was silent. It was clear that the reminder had gone home so strongly as to appeal even to his dull senses. The manner of the two was very different in all ways. Ben was ugly, surly and sour. Deborah had the air of one who feels herself mistress of the situation, and her coolness did not for a moment waver.

"Ef you'd only tell me yer plans," he finally began, again, but she interrupted:

"You would ruin all in less than no time."

"Don't I know enough ter manage my own business?"

"You are not the man for this work. You are headlong, impulsive and lacking in judgment. It's well you don't know where the golden gain is to come in, or you would ruin all."

"I reckon I'm equal to an old woman."

"You are not," calmly asserted Deborah.

"Wal, I'll be durned! I never thought ter see the like o' this, but I know you of old. You always was cantankerous an' ugly; always bound ter kick up a muss when everybody else was pleasant. The delight o' bein' mean was always your well-spring o' joy, b'mighty!"

"You speak with more of force than good sense, Mr. Wolf. We will not discuss the point. Suffice it to say that I know the way to make us both rich, but you'll have to copy my example in one respect—be patient. I am liable to bring you gold any day, Ben, but you'll gain nothing by raving over the delay and trying to get at my secret. You can't learn it."

Calmly Deborah rose.

"What be you goin'?" Briny Ben asked, more amiably.

"Home!"

"I'll go with you."

"No, you won't."

"Why not?"

"First, because you promised to keep away; secondly, because you don't know where I live; thirdly, because it's not prudent for us to be seen together."

"Have your own way."

So spoke Benjamin, but his manner was not more good-natured, and it was clear he yielded only because he saw there was no help for it. He hoped for something from Deborah Paine, and though he could and did rebel, he was not mad enough to give over all his chances simply because he wanted to be ugly.

Chief Claxton saw that the interview was over, and he made haste to get to where Deborah would not discover him. He was disappointed that the conversation had divulged no more, but it was something gained when he found the old woman for whom he had been looking.

He retreated to where Mary awaited, and a word to her was enough to cause her to take him into a place of safety until the other caller could go out.

"I am going to follow her," he announced.

"Is there hope?"

"I know not."

"Of what did they talk?"

"Of nothing which was any clue, but I hope to get the truth by following."

"Hist! they come!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE DETECTIVE ON THE TRAIL.

BOTH Claxton and Mary ceased speaking, and Briny Ben and Deborah came along from the room where they had been in consultation. The detective had a good view of both, and he could not fail to be impressed by their unprepossessing faces.

He was prepared to believe them capable of almost anything they might see fit to do for gain, and he pitied anybody they might have in their power, as their conversation indicated they did have some one.

"When'll I see you ag'in?" Ben asked.

"Possibly, to-morrow. More likely, not for a few days."

"No underhand work, now," Ben cautioned.

"Bah! you get to be a bigger fool every day!"

With this encouraging remark Deborah passed out of the house. Briny Ben looked after her and shook his head.

"I dunno, I dunno! Nobody ever was safe in trustin' a woman, by thunder! an' I feel I ain't, now, but it may be all right. Ef it ain't, jest let her look out fer herself, fer I'll do her mischief, sure ez I'm alive. Nobody kin come the roots on Briny Ben, ye know. Not much!"

Ben seemed to like to hear himself talk, and his predilection that way bade fair to bring Chief Claxton into trouble. There was no way to follow Deborah while the Water Wolf stood there and growled like a sore-headed animal.

Fortunately, he did not long keep it up. He went back to his lair and the coast was clear.

Claxton said a few words to Mary, and then slipped quietly out of the house. He feared he had lost all hope, but it was only a moment before he discovered the tall, bony figure of the woman. She had been waiting for a car, and as it now came along she boarded it and moved off.

Claxton proposed to follow, but he did not take the same course.

Calling a cab he exclaimed:

"Keep that car in sight, but don't get too near. Be prudent about it, and you shall receive more than the regular fee."

The driver happened to be a person of brains, and he lost no time.

"I'm dead onto them!" he exclaimed. "Hop in!"

Claxton did not fail to do so, and they rolled away in pursuit of the car. Every time it stopped the detective made sure it was not Deborah who alighted, and it was some while before he had cause to cease his pursuit.

When Deborah did change it was to take another car, and in this way she worked on until she was at last at the corner of Sixth avenue and Fourteenth street.

Starting eastward, she looked with some anxiety at the clock of a jeweler near at hand and then quickened her pace and went on. The journey was nearly over, however, for she turned down Fifth avenue upon reaching that point and, at the corner of Thirteenth street, found the end of her baste.

Claxton was not slow to notice a man was on the corner, pacing back and forth in a half-nervous manner, and this man at once advanced toward Deborah.

He was of fine, athletic appearance, and though roughly dressed he impressed the detective as being one of more than common rank in life.

He and Deborah met with the air of persons who had come together by appointment, and at once began to talk earnestly. The dissimilarity between them was so marked that the detective could not but wonder at it, and the fact of their meeting awakened a question in his mind.

The woman's interview with Briny Ben had developed the fact, or so seemed, that she expected to raise money in some underhand way, and Claxton wondered if the way was now dimly outlined.

Her present companion looked grave and downcast. Was he in her toils?

Anxious to see more of him, Claxton worked around cautiously until the opportunity was vouchsafed. When he had the desired view he stopped short, surprised, in spite of his long habits of self-control, by what he beheld.

The man was Judge Otis Hollowell!

Claxton regarded them in bewilderment, but the mood passed and he smiled at his own late thoughts.

"Ridiculous!" he murmured. "Judge Hollowell can have no secret upon which the old blood-sucker can trade."

A decision which seemed wise in its generation, but it was followed by another thought. The detective's long experience had often led him to advance as a fragment of worldly wisdom the assertion that no man or woman, be the subject from whatever station in life, was above suspicion, or above having a guilty secret.

Absurd as it might be to apply this to Otis Hollowell, it would certainly be more absurd to cast it out of sight when he met Deborah by night in such a way and place, himself wearing old, rough clothes in place of his usual elaborate attire.

The learned judge wishes to be unknown to all he may chance to meet. That is plain. His motive I don't know, but let us look into this a trifle."

So thought Chief Claxton, and he loitered around with the innocent air born of long practice.

The interview was not prolonged. Hollowell and Deborah talked together with the freedom of old acquaintances, it seemed, and without any disagreement perceptible in their manner. The earnestness of the conversation was not to be denied, however.

Presently the judge called a cab. It was duly engaged, and then Deborah entered and was driven away. A second vehicle of the same sort was near, and this Hollowell then secured. He was driven off in the same path the first cab had taken.

Claxton had not dismissed his own driver, and, greatly mystified, he gave orders for a continued pursuit. Thus the three vehicles rolled along one after the other, Deborah being the leader.

"Puzzling!" the detective agreed, "but I may find the explanation very simple. We will see!"

Their course was toward the west, and in due time they reached West Sixteenth street. At a certain house the leading cab halted, and Deborah alighted. The carriage then moved away. Deborah had gone into the house, but that the door was not locked was soon shown. Hollowell left his own cab, paid the driver, and then, as this man followed his predecessor, the judge turned, went to the house, turned the knob with a confident air, as if he knew it would open to his touch, and went in.

"Hived!" murmured Claxton. "But what have I secured?"

He sent his driver back to the corner, and then surveyed the house. It was one cheap and plain of exterior, and he did not doubt that the interior was the same. He believed he had found Deborah's home, but what was Judge Hallowell doing there?

He could follow no further, so he began to pace up and down the street, watching keenly without seeming to do so.

The patrolman of the block soon came along. He was a stranger to the detective, but the latter knew how to ingratiate himself to the good will of almost any one, and this he proceeded to do with the knight of the locust, talking on trivial matters.

He had one thing always in mind, however, and he worked around in due time.

"I saw a woman in yonder house, a bit ago, who seemed familiar to me, though I failed to place her. Do you know who lives there?"

The patrolman flourished his night-stick. "All I know is that there is an old woman there who goes and comes a good deal. She has groceries from the store over yonder, and they are sent to the name of Deborah Paine. I suppose that's the old bird, herself. Ain't she a corker?"

"Not very pretty, surely. Is she on the square?"

"Blamed if I know; I never saw anything out of the way."

"Don't know whether she lives alone, eh?"

"No, but I should say she must buy for at least two, by the quantity of stuff she takes."

"Is there anybody about here who can tell more about her?"

"I only know of the grocer and the landlord. The last-named lives up on Seventieth street, though. The grocer has probably gone to bed. Hullo! what hyena has broke loose?"

The last words were uttered in a tone of disgust as a sound which might mistakenly be taken for singing by some one was heard down the block.

"It's that grocer's boy, again!" lamented the patrolman. "Say, that kid will drive me mad! He thinks he kin sing, but if I had a Chinese gorilla that couldn't give him cards and spades and then wrastle him on melody I'd kill the gorilla!"

Claxton had never had experience with a "Chinese gorilla," and did not exactly understand what the thing was, but the grocer's boy was a being of fact and voice. As he came nearer the detective hurriedly directed:

"Ask him slyly about the old woman, and I'll remember it in you!"

"Done!"

The boy came up, and the patrolman began. He was not without shrewdness, and he managed to do the work well. Bearing around slowly to the subject of interest, he made his wishes known.

"Be I acquainted with Deborah Paine?" questioned the boy, in return. "Well, everybody who knows her is. She's a terror; that woman is! Makes more trouble than any three customers on the beat. Got a tongue like a needle. Just stands in her own room and gives me Hail Columbia, even if I bring the best of things. Then there's the other one—she sets there while Deb jaws, and just stares like a galvanized statoo!"

"What 'other one'?"

"Why, t'other woman."

"So there is another?"

"Why, sure. She's sick, or something of the sort; all wore out but her brains; but they are keen, and her temper is 'way up ter par."

Some other questions were asked, but the boy could tell no more that was of interest. He was allowed to go his way, and then Claxton "remembered" the patrolman with a dollar note and the latter wandered on, leaving the detective to his vigil alone.

Considerable time had elapsed since the travelers entered the house. More passed before they came out. In the meanwhile Claxton waited and watched. He could not understand why Judge Hallowell should come to such a miserable house at such an hour, disguised as he was, but he intended to find out.

It was curious, be the facts what they might, that his efforts to unravel the case had brought him to the point where the judge who sat in the Curtis case came into the game in any way, now.

The bare possibility that it was not to Deborah's rooms the learned gentleman had gone was in a measure dissipated by what occurred soon after. As Claxton watched the lighted windows he saw two figures outlined on the shade. They were those of a man and a woman, and his acquaintance with the peculiarities of both those he had traced was enough to make him almost sure on one point.

"Hallowell and Deborah! They stand close together, and seem to talk with animation and zeal. What mystery have I stumbled upon?"

CHAPTER X.

THE JUDGE IS SORELY TRIED.

As has been seen, Judge Hallowell met Deborah according to the compact made in his

own house the time she called on him so unexpectedly. The interview was to be twenty-four hours after the woman's visit, and as time passed he had no intention of failing to keep it.

He was determined to put her claims to the test and learn if Salome really lived—if his first wife had actually failed to die in her youth as he had thought was the case.

The waiting was tedious, and he was glad he had no longer to think upon it in suspense. During the time, however, there was no evidence of weakness in his manner.

Both on the bench and in his home he was the same iron judge who had been known of yore.

Well, indeed, was it for him he could so govern his every act and expression.

He met Deborah; he went with her to her home, as has been seen; he passed the door of the house and was near the proof or disproof of his fears.

Once in the place his courage wavered more than he would have cared to confess. The coolness of his companion seemed to be that of one who has victory in her grasp, and it was impressive.

Deborah led him up the stairs, and to a waiting room.

"Remain here until I see if Salome is ready to receive you," Deborah directed, and passed on.

Otis Hallowell shivered. To see if Salome was ready to see him! How that recalled old memories! Back in his youth there was a time when Salome was perfect in his sight, or near enough so to be able to sway his heart at her will. Then, he had often gone to her in a mood of anxious anticipation—gone to see if she was ready to receive him.

Now—now, what a change!

He could hardly realize it. Years had passed; his life had run in new channels; he had almost forgotten Salome, and all the more readily because, long before, he had ceased to feel any admiration for her.

But if she lived—if she did! How much it meant to him!

Knowing how capable Deborah was of any subterfuge, he was still possessed of some hope that he would be able to detect a trick, and that he could throw off the yoke and rise victorious, instead of meeting the awful calamity which menaced him and all he held dear.

Deborah returned.

"Salome is ready!"

Coldly the words were spoken.

The judge felt a chill of ice upon his heart. He rose mechanically. He was ready, too.

"Come!"

Deborah led the way. It was only to the next room. At that time the visitor did not think of looking to see what that room was like. If he had he would have seen that it was plainly and meagerly furnished; he would have seen evidences of poverty which were not to be found in his own luxurious home.

He saw only the person he had come to see.

In the center of the room was a large easy-chair. In the chair sat a woman. His gaze met hers.

She was clad in decent black, but it would not have gained her notice for its richness or style. In the apparel, and in her own appearance, there was nothing to make an agreeable impression.

Her face was hard; exceedingly hard and bitter, though the last element was subordinate to the same coldness seen in Deborah's manner. As she gazed at him her expression did not change. It was fixed and firm; it was severe and unwomanly; it was ice-like and inexorable.

Yet, had she been less cold, there was that in her face which would have recommended her to pity. Although still a comparatively young woman her hair was very gray, and in each lineament of her countenance hovered the marks of ill health. She was not emaciated in any degree, yet the stamp was there, telling of suffering and physical pain.

All this was of a nature to excite sympathy, yet the face, itself, repulsed where the illness softened.

Not of this did Otis Hallowell think at that moment. All his attention was given to establishing the truth or falsity of the assertion that she was Salome.

The first sight gave him a shock.

Twenty years had passed since he had seen his first wife. The lapse of time had changed him greatly; it had changed the woman more, since she had had illness to contend with.

But he saw the dark complexion; the hair which, where it was not gray, was still so deeply black; the dark, large eyes; the heavy brows and the firm mouth; and each feature was as he remembered it so well.

His power of resistance fled; he gave up the fight, then.

Deborah had been watching both keenly.

"Must I introduce you two?" she asked, sarcastically.

Hallowell drew a deep breath and aroused to life.

Looking at the woman in the chair he murmured:

"We meet again!"

"We do!" coldly, grimly replied the relic of the past.

"It is like seeing one from the grave."

"The grave is not kind enough to take me. Look! Do you think I am better in life than in death?"

She half-lifted her hand, but it fell back to her side.

"Salome," pronounced Deborah, "is the victim of a spinal complaint which has robbed her of all but breath. She cannot take a step; she has to be cared for in all things more than a child; she is so helpless she rises and retires only with my help; she is unable to feed herself, or to move her hands and feet as others do. She is a living wreck!"

The words fell with painful effect upon Hallowell's ears. For the moment he forgot what it meant that this woman still lived, and remembered only the youthful Salome he had loved with the madness of youth—loved so well he had made her his wife.

It was a shock.

"We have not been used alike in this world," pursued Salome, in a voice unshaken by emotion. "You have had the sweets, and I the things which are bitter. I have known poverty, sorrow and disease."

The nerveless hand moved feebly in her lap, and her helplessness appealed to Hallowell strongly.

"You shall have the best doctor that money can procure," he declared. "I will engage an eminent specialist who will be able to help you, if anybody can."

"I am not unmindful of your offer, and I cannot afford to refuse it, but I think you will find he will say like all others: that there is no help for me."

"Let us hope not."

Mechanically Hallowell made the reply, but the faintest possible smile on Deborah's face recalled him to other matters with a start. He had more to think of than the curing of Salome.

"You see," remarked Deborah, "that I have not lied to you."

The judge could not dispute the claim.

"Let us confront the facts of the case," added the old woman.

Confront the facts! What did that not mean to Otis Hallowell!

"To put it briefly," Deborah proceeded, "you find that Salome is alive. Perhaps you have learned that the young man in the Tombs is your son?"

"Tell me how all this has come about!" cried the judge. "Through the years I never have had the least doubt that Salome and the boy died. How, in mercy's name, does it come about that they live?"

Deborah motioned to Salome. The latter's expression had grown colder and more severe, and there was hatred in the gaze she bent upon the visitor.

"Did you ever concern yourself to learn if we were dead?" she demanded.

"I took what I thought were reasonable precautions, but I was a boy, then, and I may have erred."

"You erred more than once!" cried Salome, bitterly. "Then, I bore the weight of your sins; now, they are come home to you. I have borne them for years; now, you can take your share."

"In what way did I ever do you harm?" demanded Hallowell, with impulsive warmth.

"You broke my heart and ruined my life with your systematic cruelty. You—"

"Never!" declared the judge. "You cannot point to one word or act of mine which will sustain that charge. We did not get along well together as husband and wife, but when did I ever fail to remember my duty? Boy I was, but I had married you, and I tried my best to have peace at our fireside."

"Peace!" echoed Salome, with scorn.

"I knew before I married you that you were volatile, willful and wild, but I was blinded to what these qualities in an engaged girl would lead in a wife. I soon found out. Your temper it was, and nothing more, which ruined all. You began to lead me a cat-and-dog life, and my love died out; I confess it. Still, I tried to do my duty, for it was hard to forget the old life wholly. You know how, even when we could hardly meet in peace, I still kept up the home, leaving you to do with it as you pleased—"

"Yes; you did leave me!"

"Was I allowed to remain?"

"You were master of the house."

"Excuse me; I was not."

"Who was?"

"There was no master. You were mistress, and in that capacity you became all else. You ruled with a rod of iron, and, when I ventured to come near you, drove me out with your temper and reproaches."

Both were getting warmed to their subject, and accusations flowed with zeal. Salome's eyes flashed with hatred, while Hallowell was deeply moved as the weight of the old wrongs, real or imaginary, as the case might be, came over him with reviving influence.

Deborah sharply interrupted:

"You both forget yourselves; you are here,

not to bring up old quarrels, but to speak of the future."

"True!"

The judge made the acknowledgment with a deep sigh. Then he added:

"One thing more must be attended to. I must know how you happen to be alive; how the boy happens to be living if he is the unfortunate young man now in the Tombs."

"He is. Can you doubt it?"

"I have expressed no opinion."

"We can give you documentary evidence in full if you doubt, but I know of no more convincing proof than the birthmark on his arm."

So thought Otis Hollowell.

"You evade my question—"

"Not by any means. The boy and I live because we escaped the flood when the river rose and washed so many to death. The bodies you found and buried were those of I know not whom. Enough that we escaped. We were not in the cottage when the waters came to kill, and we were not victims."

"I was not satisfied with the identification," Hollowell admitted, "but all others declared they were sure, and I yielded as much to their emphatic assertions as to my own opinions. Then, when days passed and no word came from, or of you, I lost all doubt."

"I had resolved to disappear from your view forever."

"You kept the resolution too long, or not long enough!" bitterly answered the judge.

"You did not long mourn for me before taking another wife."

"Do not speak of her!" cried Hollowell.

"Is she too good to be mentioned here?"

"She is too unfortunate."

"True, she is not your wife, but she has your home and name. I have neither. I envy her."

"My God! why?"

"She is not your married slave."

"Besilent, woman!"

"No marriage law binds her—"

"Be silent, I say! Dare to cast another sneer at her and—"

The judge stopped short. He had clinched his hands and taken a step toward the woman, but he remembered her condition and paused abruptly. She watched him with the attention of a cat, and with the bitter look on her face he so well remembered in the old Salome. So she had delighted to wring his heart.

His temporary pity for the invalid went out. Womanly attributes had not come to her with illness, and it was plain she was the most vindictive of foes.

She made a strange picture. She was surrounded in a chair by pillows, and these kept her upright. She did not once move, and could have moved but little under any condition. Her helpless hands always lay in her lap in the same way, and her head was rarely turned in the east. She looked like a corpse gifted with the power to flash hatred and malevolence.

And this woman was between him and happiness, between him and the lady the world knew as his wife!

He felt an unusual weakness, as if all his strength had been used up, and a desire to be alone.

The desire became a ruling passion.

"The hour grows late," he remarked. "I cannot delay here, and I do not see that we need say more at this time. I will see you again—"

"You will always be welcome!" sneered Salome.

"I shall have more to say when I have an opportunity to think. I need to confront the state of affairs I find here. Until I see you again, accept this."

He drew a roll of bank-notes from his pocket. He made one step to hand them to Salome, but suddenly changed his mind and passed them over to Deborah, instead.

Two pair of eyes glistened with cupidity, and no remonstrance was made against his disposal of the case.

They did not fear he would run away.

With heavy steps he went out of the house.

He went, and Chief Claxton followed him home.

CHAPTER XI.

MONEY IS PAID OVER.

SEVERAL men were seated in a room which was over a certain saloon in New York. They were persons who each and all bore the stamp which marks the city "sport," and they had the knowing air of the man who thinks he does know it all.

Outside the room two other men stood in conversation. One was the proprietor of the saloon; and the other was one well known in these pages, though hardly recognizable to his own friends.

His name was Claxton; his occupation was that of a detective; but he did not any longer look it.

He had donned clothing which was fanciful and "loud," and had a certain buoyant air to accompany the garments which made him seem anything but dignified.

"Claxton," declared the owner of the premises, "I hate to do this thing."

"It will be better for both of us," calmly as-

sured Claxton. "You know it would disappoint me to be refused, while as for you—"

"You would give my secrets away to the police?"

"Exactly!"

"I yield, much as I dislike to do it. Come to me!"

He escorted the detective into the room. All eyes became fixed upon them. The saloon-keeper went to the crowd and lightly announced:

"Boys, this is Dan Murphy, a friend of mine. If any of you want to try him at poker, you had better have some blank checks all filled out for use."

It was well done when done, and Mr. Murphy, thus jestingly introduced, was duly received by all. Nobody thought of doubting him when he had been introduced from such a source.

Despite his attire and quaint air of rakishness he still preserved a kind of clergyman-like look, and this was such a novelty to the others that they took more interest in him than they would otherwise have done. They talked with him freely.

It was not Claxton's first essay in the role, and he was not at a loss for material to carry out his plan. He talked with the best of them, and was soon voted a hail-fellow-well-met.

He had sat down at the table by the side of a young man who rejoiced in the name of Duncan Davies, and who was no stranger, as far as appearances went, to the detective; but if anybody had told Mr. Davies that there was meaning in all this, he would have been surprised.

He rather ignored Dan Murphy at first, but the latter warmed him up without seeming to have any aim in doing so.

Presently a game of poker was proposed, and some time was thus spent. Daniel proved that he was no novice at the game, and in a way that brought sorrow to the hearts of many there. In fact, no one did as well in the contest as Daniel, except Davies, and the latter gained his superiority of winnings in the last round by stubbornly "bluffing" when he held only two pairs of eights. Up to that time Dan had seemed to have great nerve, but flung down his cards and mixed them with the pack with an air of disgust.

Davies chuckled much over his success.

He might have been less amused had he known that Dan had put down four aces.

It may have been poor judgment; it may have been good. Anyhow, it pleased and warmed Davies up, and he first ordered drinks for the crowd, and then took Daniel aside and began to talk with him in great good humor.

He told of wonderful success at cards, and then wound around to another subject, avowing his deep admiration for ladies.

"I don't suppose," he asserted, "there is another man in New York who has a more profound respect for the sex than I. I've been in love more times than a few, and though I've always got out of it alive, I now have a case that is going hard with me."

"You seem to hold your own well."

"Hope does it; hope! But I must wait a bit; she has another lover, and though he is likely to soon go off the hooks, her heart is all torn up over him, now. Oh! but she's a good one!"

"May I ask where you find such a paragon?" questioned Daniel.

"Since you look to be fifty years old, you may. She is named Mary Wolf, and she's the daughter of a poor but honest 'longshoreman. Old man, the darling is a screamer!"

"Well recommended, anyhow."

"None too well."

"So you're going to marry her?"

"Yes; later on."

"Accept my best wishes when you get her. If you had the passion for the water that I have you would cultivate the 'longshoreman, as well as his daughter, and thus serve both sides of a good aim in life."

"So you like the water?"

"Yes."

"By Jove! come with me, any day, and you shall have your fill. Briny Ben has a boat which is always at my disposal, and we can have some famous pulls on the river. Ben is her father, you see."

"I shall accept your invitation, friend, for it is just what I want. I was born and brought up near the water, but blessed little of it have I got of late."

"Come around and let me introduce you to Ben, now."

"Not to-day— Oh! well, why not? Time hangs heavily on my hands. Lead off, my hearty, and I'll go with you."

Davies had taken a strong fancy to his new friend, and he did not take his offer back. They left the house and wended their way toward Ben Wolf's.

Chief Claxton had already notified Mary that she need not be surprised to see him in any role, but he was not sure but the boldness of the present move would result disadvantageously.

She might by an unlucky start betray him.

Fortunately, she was not in when they arrived, but Briny Ben was. Unfortunately, perhaps, Ben did not receive the new guests as Davies had hoped he would. Ben was wily, and

he had good reasons for not wanting to make new acquaintances.

It was not his way to trust any one when he could help it, and as long as he made the calling of a river thief his, he wanted as few friends as possible.

He was surly to the stranger, but this was not heeded by Daniel. He proceeded to make himself agreeable. In this he was not wholly unsuccessful, for Ben could find no fault with his manner, and the surly waterman had promised the ride in his boat before the callers had been there over half an hour.

It was not the strongest of footholds, but now that Ben's nature was so far unfolded by himself, the detective felt that it was a good deal gained. Perhaps more would come later.

Claxton and Davies left the house soon after. The former was desirous of eliciting something from the sport which would bear upon the illegal operations on the river, but Duncan was duly cautious and let nothing slip. When they parted Claxton could not say he was any the wiser, but he had gained the good will of at least one of the river thieves, and he hoped something would come of it.

They separated, and each went his way.

That evening Mary Wolf called upon Claxton.

"I want you to explain something which puzzles me," she exclaimed, after a little conversation.

"Very well; give me the chance."

"My father has had a visitor."

"The same old woman?"

"Yes; Deborah, I heard him call her."

"Delightful name! And what did our fair Deborah have to say?"

"That I don't know, but she gave father a sum of money."

"Lucky Benjamin!"

"I don't know that he is."

"No?"

"No. Why should she give him money?"

"True."

The detective murmured the reply as if he saw nothing worthy of excitement about the matter.

"She has a hard face, and I don't believe she is one to be generous to anybody. Even if she is, why should she give to him? He is a well, strong man, much younger than she."

"That is true."

"I can't help thinking," added Mary, hesitatingly, "that he may have done some favor for her."

Chief Claxton did not think so, but he was puzzled over the money matter. What he had learned before had prepared him for it, in a measure, for the repeated visits of the woman indicated some secret understanding, but he did not know why she should give Ben money.

That it was in payment for some service Claxton felt sure was an incorrect surmise. Ben had never hinted at it in the conversation of which the detective had heard a part.

"Describe how the money was given," Claxton directed.

"There is but little to tell. Deborah called, and they were in the front room. They talked secretly, and then she took out the money and handed it over."

"How did he receive it?"

"Eagerly."

"As if it was a right?"

"Yes. And when he had it he grumbled a good deal—because it had not come sooner, I thought."

"Possibly you are right."

Chief Claxton's thoughts went back to the meeting between Deborah and Judge Hollowell. What had taken place in the house on Sixteenth street he did not know, but it was suggestive that the woman should be flush with money right after it.

"I don't understand it," Mary repeated.

"Nor I."

"But can't you find out?"

"Perhaps so."

"Can there be a connection," slowly asked the girl, "between this matter and Homer Curtis? I think Deborah knows something about Homer, since she or somebody else had the date of his birth; and now she gives money to father. I am worried; I am sorely worried. I am afraid father is keeping back the secret of Homer's case—though it seems absurd."

"Rely upon it, this money transaction has nothing to do with the killing of Morris Strong," decidedly replied Claxton. "It may be anything else; it is not that!"

Mary sighed.

"I had hoped—yet feared!"

"Poor child! I know how you feel, but be comforted. Good often follows in the track of evil. Be of hope."

"If I only could!"

"You must, for Curtis's sake."

"I will; I will!" Mary exclaimed. "Who knows what may happen?"

CHAPTER XII.

A WORK OF DECEIT.

Two days later a man of foreign appearance left Judge Hollowell's house and walked off down the street. His manner was at first careless but he soon assumed a brisker way, and,

after a glance around as if to assure himself he was not under observation, he continued at a rapid pace.

Boarding a car in due time he went on until he could ride no longer. Then he walked still further, and found himself in a humble quarter wholly unlike that which gave an air of elegance to all about Hollowell's neighborhood.

Ringling a certain door-bell he was soon in the presence of Chief Claxton.

The caller was Edward Acton.

"Hal!" exclaimed the detective, with more than his usual animation, "so it is you! How goes it?"

"I am just from the judge's house."

"Well?"

"I am safely domiciled there."

"And unsuspected?"

"So far, yes."

"Good! I think it will be all right."

"I hope so, but I still remember that, though I took no open part in Homer Curtis's trial, I was often in the court-room, and I fear the keen-eyed judge will remember having seen me there."

"Be at ease! Hollowell's business in court is to sit in judgment on prisoners, not to act the policeman. I'll almost swear he never looks to see who is among the loungers, or disinterested parties, and you did not appear as a witness. Well, how were you received?"

"With great kindness, and yet with due formality, such as was to be expected from one of Hollowell's breeding and social position. He has been all I could desire. He said the letter from Senor Aquillez, of Australia, was all the recommendation I needed, and he cordially invited me to make my home with his family while I was in New York."

"Aquillez rendered him valuable service when he was in Australia, and he was Aquillez's guest. All I fear is that when you put off your present clothes for New York made ones—if you do—you will lose your foreign appearance. True, your dark complexion gives color to the claim that you are the son of an American father and a Spanish mother; but let us not borrow trouble. How like you the judge?"

"He seems to be a fine man."

"He is so regarded."

"Yet, you have set me to watch him."

"Old things often occur!" murmured Chief Claxton.

"I wish," earnestly declared Acton, "you would tell me what you expect from Hollowell's house. I can't see how anything is to be learned which will help Homer Curtis."

"My friend, I was never more sincere than when I told you I did not know, either. If I had not had good reasons for the step I should not have sent you to Hollowell's, yet I do not see how it will prove anything for Curtis."

"Yet, you sent me."

"Yes."

"I am working in the dark."

"So am I!"

"I beg your pardon if I seem over-curious, but I am so bound up in small compass by my role of working without clue to anything whatever that I am in constant fear of making some blunder. If I were better informed, I could always be on my guard."

"Should the time come when I can divulge anything, I will do so gladly."

Acton dropped the argument. He saw that the detective was bound not to tell anything then, and, as Homer Curtis's welfare was the all-important consideration, he did not see fit to make more talk over the ways and means.

Claxton undoubtedly knew best.

"Of course," added the detective, presently, "you have seen the judge's family?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of them?"

"Mrs. Hollowell is one of the sweetest and, at the same time, most capable woman I ever saw."

"And the daughter?" Claxton asked, as Acton hesitated for a moment.

There was a slight deepening of color in Edward's face.

"A good copy of her mother, with all the glory of youth added to other glories. A most beautiful, amiable, refined and attractive girl, if I am to describe her to the letter."

"Ah!"

Chief Claxton murmured the word in his usual quiet way. Acton feared he had been too clear, but when he looked for any sign in the detective's face he saw nothing.

"I regret," Edward went on, "that I am obliged to appear before such a family in any but a straightforward role. It's bad enough to act the part of duplicity in any case, but when one takes worthy people to impose upon, it makes him feel small!"

Once more the speaker was afraid he had said too much, but his companion continued impassive.

"That's a fact," Claxton agreed.

"This matter is not likely to injure them, is it?" persevered Acton.

"How can it? Of course none of the Hollowells had share in the slaying of Morris Strong—the idea would be absurd. Rest easy; you

have only to watch at the house and report all details of what you see. Pray do so now!"

Edward made the report.

He had never been more surprised than when Claxton came to him and asked him to go to the judge's house in such a role. Claxton knew the Senor Aquillez whose name was used in the case, and knew of his being in New York, though Hollowell did not; and by some hold he had on the senor, he had prevailed upon the latter to write, as if from Australia, a letter which introduced Acton as Warren Vinton, an Australian.

This letter had gained the young man access to Hollowell's home.

As Acton was so much in the dark, himself, he really thought he had nothing to report, but Claxton resolved himself into an inquisitor and asked questions without limit.

At times his words seemed so irrelevant to Acton that the latter was surprised, but Claxton took all without comment. Whether he found consolation in the result he did not say.

Finally, he made a motion as if the interview was nearing an end.

"Thus far," he remarked, "you have done all I can ask. Return to your work, and be patient and careful. Watch all that occurs. Observe Hollowell, his wife and his daughter. See what their mood is each day, and if you notice anything odd in their acts."

If the detective had been perfectly frank he would not have included either the wife or daughter in this direction, but he could not betray everything to Acton.

"Observe," he continued, "whether they have callers who are not of their rank in life. See who these callers are, if any such come, and report to me fully."

Claxton cleaned his finger-nails with scrupulous care, and slowly added:

"If you see any of the family go out clothed in a way not customary to them, follow quietly and secretly, and see where he or she goes."

The speaker put away his knife.

"Possibly," he resumed, in a voice so slow as to be almost a drawl, "only Hollowell is likely to go on such an expedition, for even if the ladies wished to, they would hardly venture. They would be more likely"—Claxton paused to yawn—"more likely to send Hollowell, in any case. Yes, I think so. But watch, watch! Vigilance is the price of liberty in some cases. In other cases," and the eyes of the detective suddenly brightened, "it is the price of human life. Watch, my friend: watch unceasingly!"

Edward Acton felt oppressed. There was that in this injunction which touched him deeply. The latent flash of feeling in Claxton's manner disproved any lack of interest, and he began to realize that he was engaged in serious work—and engaged without any idea of what he was doing. He remembered Claxton's reputation—the "Record-Breaker," he was called; and it meant something.

And he was a blind instrument of a cunning man!

There was no use of arguing, so Edward let it rest as it was. He heard the rest of the injunction, and then took his leave.

"By Jove!" he thought as he went back toward Hollowell's, "a man don't know what he is tackling when he lets himself be made the instrument of a detective. I am left all in the dark, and yet I must work for Claxton. To what end? Why under the light of the sun has he sent me to the judge's house? None of them can be in any way connected with the tragedy, or with the solution of the mystery, and I am ashamed to act the spy. But all this is for Homer Curtis! Let me remember that, and go on, even if it does hurt me to deceive such people."

Then he had a more consoling thought:

"Perhaps the detective thinks the real criminals will come to Hollowell, to try and keep him from weakening on what he has done against Homer."

It was not a brilliant theory, but Acton was in a mood to grasp at straws.

Reaching the house, he encountered Alice Hollowell in the hall.

He had not over-praised her when talking with Claxton. She was of a refined style of beauty which made her a delight to the eye, while the stamp of true womanly goodness was on her face as indelibly as nature ever applied it. Her manner was gracious and kind, mingled with the merry spirit of youth which, in her case, was sure to wound or severely try others.

At her father's request she had greeted the supposed Australian with cordiality, and he had, in her opinion, thus far proved worthy of it all.

Acton had been reared in a style equal to her own, and the saying that blood will tell was well illustrated in his case. Although claiming to hail from a distant land he was intelligent enough to have made his way well in the new circle he was in, even if he had been unaccustomed to New York ways; and the one fact was apparent if the other was not.

They now adjourned to the parlor, and Alice entertained him as she well knew how, with kindness and with womanly grace.

The young man each moment found her more attractive from his point of view. That subtle something which cannot be analyzed by all the

art and high-sounding phraseology of those who have tried, brought them together in spirit, as people, and especially the young, will be attracted one to the other when congeniality exists.

It was this which made his task so especially obnoxious to Acton. It was bad enough to deceive Judge Hollowell, a gentleman he regarded as all that was courteous and upright; but it was worse to act a treacherous part when Alice was concerned, and, perhaps, lay the foundation for that which would make her hate and despise him later on.

CHAPTER XIII.

TROUBLE COMES IN.

"ARE you ever down-hearted?"

Alice asked the question abruptly, after she and Acton had been in conversation for some time.

Edward could not avoid a slight start.

"Down-hearted?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"Well, I think I have a fairly buoyant nature," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Because, though I have thought my nature was that way, too, I am beginning to doubt it."

"Indeed! I am sorry to hear that. I trust there is no visible foundation for such a feeling?"

"I can't say there is, and it annoys me to think I am basing my fears on something unseen and unknown. In brief, I am oppressed with a presentiment of evil!"

She laughed as she said it; not with the free manner of one who fully realizes a weakness, but more as if she was afraid of being laughed at. She need have had no fear. The apparently trivial matter gave Acton a decided shock.

"Do you believe in presentiments?" she added.

"I never have."

"Nor I. I feel that I am absurd, now, but the feeling remains."

"May I ask when it began?"

"It was since you came—"

She stopped short, hesitated, and then added with some embarrassment:

"That was certainly an awkward remark, but I trust you will not regard it as anything more than a chance and unhappy connection of events. Of course I did not mean to associate one occurrence with the other."

"You need hardly say it, Miss Hollowell, for I am well aware of your good intentions."

He was, but he did not feel any more reconciled to her presentiment after the error she had made.

"In brief," she admitted, "I have been oppressed with a fear of, I know not what. It seems as if something unpleasant was about to happen."

How many times Edward had laughed at presentiments before! He did not laugh now. Yet, if anybody had asked him if he believed in such things, he would have replied in the negative without hesitation.

If he was worried now, and he was, it was because "Conscience hath made cowards of us all," according to the old saw.

"Perhaps," pursued Alice, "my gloomy feelings rise from the fact that my father has not been in his usual spirits of late. He is very dear to me, and when I see, as I have done recently, that something is troubling him, it troubles me."

"I did not imagine he was a gentleman who had any troubles."

"He never has been, but now—"

Acton waited anxiously for the completion of the remark.

"Now, something does seem to worry him. I have not ventured to ask what it is."

Edward wished he had not been made the recipient of this confidence. He was not in good spirits, anyhow, and to see Alice's melancholy face gave him a fresh depression, himself. Suddenly she brightened.

"How foolish I am, to be sure! I don't know why I have told you all this nonsense, only I happened to meet you when I was feeling just right to be foolish. Forget all about it—I am going to."

Quickly changing the subject she began to talk lightly, and the charm of the new mood made Edward for the time forget her presentiment.

She had left him alone, somewhat later, when Judge Hollowell entered the house. Acton had found his host a man who knew how to entertain faultlessly, and it was not different, now, but, though he asked after the welfare of the supposed Australian, and said all a host could, his manner impressed Edward strongly in another way.

The strong face of the judge looked worn and troubled. He did not betray the fact as others would have done, but the signs were there, nevertheless, and Acton remembered Alice's words.

When he had gone to his room, presently, he reviewed everything.

"Am I in a family already afflicted with trouble, and here as a spy and traitor? By heavens! the role is a most ignoble one, and I will fill it no longer! But Curtis!—Curtis, and his battle for life! I must keep to my work; I must, let the result be what it may. Yes; I'll go on, but I feel sure Alice's presentiment will

be realized. The presentiment came after I entered the house! That is clear to me, if not to her. But, nonsense! what is a presentiment? A thing of the imagination, temporarily out of order. Shall I stop for a presentiment? Not I! I'll go on, and then—then Alice will hate me!"

He paused, dwelt upon the idea, and added: "She will hate me!"

That seemed to mean a good deal to him, for he made a quick, nervous gesture, and looked exceedingly gloomy. Then, presently, he irritably supplemented:

"What a fool I am!"

He was fully convinced of it at that moment, yet he could not fight down the feelings which were in his mind. He respected and admired all of Hallowell's family, and the outlook was not pleasant. At all times he was confronted with one thought:

"What act may not Claxton ask of me, yet?"

At that moment Otis Hallowell was in his private room, even more actively engaged in thought. He dwelt not upon troubles which might come, but those already at hand.

There had been no change for the better, and he did not see how any could occur. With Salome alive the position of the present inmates of his house was fixed and unalterable. If the arm of law was not about them, nothing could put it there. Believing his first wife to be dead he had never taken any steps to annul the marriage, and she must remain his only legal wife while she lived.

Perhaps he could keep the truth from Alice's mother by bribing Salome and Deborah, but could he, himself, ever enjoy life while he knew of the family curse?

Again, there was Homer Curtis.

Not once in the long stretch of years had he imagined he had a son, but the fact that it might be so—he believed, now, that it was—kept his mind busy much of the time.

A son, and he had sentenced him to the gallows!

It counted not then that he had been a mere agent of the law. He had done the duty imposed upon him by law, but it was not now in a composed spirit that he reflected upon the fact. He had sentenced his own son! How the thought haunted him! How it was always at hand, like a fiend that mocked his weakness.

He was weaker than he had thought. A few weeks before he would have disclaimed the imputation that he could have a kind feeling for one charged with crime, no matter how much long years of love had endeared that one to him.

Now, here was a young man he had never been attracted to until the whole web of his life seemed about to be torn to pieces in ignominy and disgrace, yet the iron judge was touched in spite of all.

Strangely was he drawn toward the doomed prisoner.

"If I could believe he is not my son— But I cannot believe it. The assertions of the women are backed up by proof I cannot well question. Yet, it may be that if I were to see him his own lips would give me proof that he is not what he seems. He cannot have been in the plot against me, or he would not have been content to wait until he was legally sentenced. If I could see him!"

It was the first time the idea had entered his mind. If he could see this wretched young man who was to die so miserably!

"I must see him! Yes; I'll make some excuse, no matter how feeble; and go to his cell. I'll talk with the doomed wretch; I'll ask him of his past; I'll see if he is like— Oh! God, what if he should be like any one I know, in manner!"

Again came the struggle to avoid believing he was the father of the convicted criminal; the old, vain struggle, which haunted him all through the days, whether in his home, on the street, or upon the bench; the attempt to defy his own belief, and the war of failure.

"I must see him," was the decision. "It can be done with the warden's help without any publicity, and it may result in something. I want to know the young man's past. I trust it will not be as unhappy as my own."

His thoughts went back over a long stretch of years.

United with his strong will there had been a perverseness in those days, and at the age of twenty years he had left his father's house, cut loose from all home associations and all he knew, and gone out into the world with the folly of youth to live apart from all his kindred.

He had plenty of money which he had inherited, so it was in no sense a struggle for bread. On the contrary, he continued in elegant leisure, suiting his tastes fully, but, as he had no bent for dissipation, being free from that curse.

He met Salome Paine.

She was young, brilliant in her way, and possessed of a certain kind of beauty. She had health and the strength of a man. She had the blackest of black hair, abundant and glossy; she had fine black eyes and rosy cheeks; and she had a kind of dashing buoyancy of spirits which captivated Hallowell.

Handsome she was, but it was not the kind of good looks he would have admired a few years

later. There was not in her nature any refinement, delicacy of feeling or regard for what was noble. She was as fully animal as the panther of the forest.

Hallowell, bittered by his family troubles, did not wait to find out anything more about her than that she captivated his imagination.

He married her.

After a few months things went wrong. She had a temper which she never tried to control, and it made trouble. He did the best that could be expected of one of his years to keep peace, and he had all the more reason when a son was born to him. This was with him a tie; a demand for good will. It made no difference with Salome. She cared nothing for the child, and began to care less for the man of her choice.

Fire needs fuel to feed upon. Hallowell had already found he had made a mistake, and, when he also found he had lost all her regard, her fits of temper, indifference and scorn—each had its turn—became harder to bear.

Like begets like. Gradually his love for her, responding to the example she set, died away, and only the burden of the mistake remained.

One night he left the house abruptly after a quarrel. When he returned to the town it was to ride madly for fifty miles upon hearing that the valley was in the embrace of a flood.

He arrived too late to see or save his wife and child. The house had gone down in the flood.

Later, bodies were found which, despite their unpleasant condition, others identified as those of his wife and child. Uncertain at first, he finally accepted the positive assertions of neighbors and servants that the bodies were, indeed, what they claimed, and when, after several months passed and no word came from the lost ones, the last thought that they had escaped left his mind.

Such was the history of his unfortunate marriage.

And wife and son still lived!

He regretted that he had not questioned Salome further, when he last saw her, to learn how she had escaped, but the point was not material.

He was face to face with the facts of the case, and they were keenly real to him. No wonder he brooded over them; no wonder Alice saw a change in him.

"I must see Curtis," he murmured. "I want the young man's story, too. I want all I can get on this unfortunate subject. I'll see him!"

A servant knocked at the door, and delivered the message:

"A lady to see you, sir."

"Who is it?" and there was irritation in the judge's voice.

"She said you would not know her name, and she did not give it, sir. She is not dressed like a wealthy person, and she looks like one in trouble."

"I will see her."

It was the last words which had led to the decision. Otis Hallowell knew how to appreciate the situation of any one who was in trouble.

He went down and saw a pale, slight girl who had an attractive but sad face. She rose and stood as if frightened at her own temerity.

"I think I do not know you," he remarked, kindly.

"My name, sir," she faltered, "is Mary Wolf!"

CHAPTER XIV.

FOR THE DOOMED MAN'S SAKE.

JUDGE HALLOWELL bowed politely. The face of the girl before him could not but impress him as being that of a good face, and the shadow of trouble resting upon it appealed to his sympathy still further. He was learning late in life that he did have a fund of sympathy, and learning, as too many do, through the effects of his own troubles.

"In what way can I be of service to you?" he inquired, kindly.

Mary looked uncertain how to meet the question.

"I am afraid to tell you," she admitted.

"That need not be the case. While I do not agree to do anything until I know what it is, there is no reason why you should not tell me what has brought you here, and do it freely."

"I—I want to speak of Homer Curtis, sir!"

Hallowell could not avoid a slight start.

"You will remember him as an unfortunate young man who was before you in the courtroom lately," she added.

Remember? Could he ever forget?

The once-iron judge regarded her more closely.

"Is Mr. Curtis a friend of yours?" he inquired. Her head drooped.

"A very dear friend," she replied, almost inaudibly.

"Ah!"

"I—I am his promised wife!" Mary admitted, with a sigh.

"Indeed!"

It was no idle repetition of expressions, for the judge was studying her face sharply. At the trial no one had appeared who claimed kindred with the prisoner, and, with the knowledge he had of the case, Hallowell believed he could see

why this was. Now, with himself in the background, it was a new sensation to find Curtis had one who was with him in heart, and all it implied.

What company did the doomed man keep?

Fortunately for his reputation in his father's eyes there could be no doubt as to Mary Wolf. No one could see her without feeling that she was noble in the full sense of the term.

She was slow to say more, and the judge finally murmured:

"His promised wife! The chances of your ever being more than that do not seem to be the best."

"Oh! sir, do not say that!" Mary cried. "There must be hope!—there must, for he is innocent! He is not guilty; he cannot be! Oh! sir, I know him well; I know him to be incapable of the horrible crime charged against him. There is not one thought in his mind; there is not one inclination which would lead him to crime. I know it, for I understand him so well!"

It was not a logical argument. Even the dullest of men could see that, while for one who sat on the bench as Otis Hallowell had done, it was merely the wild and sympathetic plea of a woman with a heart bowed down with grief.

Mary's hands were clasped tightly, nervously, and she could hardly articulate in her sorrow and fear, but the plea was eloquent in its demonstration of affection, if not in logic.

"Have you any more evidence?" kindly asked the judge.

"Unfortunately, I have not, but do not let that influence you, sir. I have come to you for help; I have come to beg that you will do something for him! Oh! sir, you are powerful, and I beg of you that you will use your influence for him! Others tell me it is outside your province, but I know you have influence—all in your position have. You are great and influential, and his life is at stake—his life and mine, for I cannot live without him. Oh! hear the prayer of a wretched woman and save him from his fate!"

She fell on her knees at his feet, and her voice was like the wail of a lost soul.

She lifted her clasped hands to him in prayer; she turned the full battery of her tear-suffused eyes upon him; she pleaded with voice, and eye, and expression, and with her drooping figure, and with all the viewless but wonderful potency of her womanly love.

Judge Hallowell's face trembled; he could hardly keep back the tears which would have dimmed his own eyes.

Gently he tried to lift her to her feet.

"Let us talk—"

"Yes, yes; but only here!" she cried. "I will not rise until I have your pledge to help him! I will not!—I will not!"

It was no longer the shrinking girl, timid in the presence of one above her in worldly station, but the woman and the love which was hers, conquered all else and made social rank a thing of infinitesimal proportion.

"But I will talk the same with you elsewhere—"

"Promise me now,—here, here!"

It was on the judge's lips to give the promise that he would do all he could, but he remembered that if he did help the prisoner the fact must be concealed from all the world.

Unless he would make a direct bid for the revealing of his secret, it must be unknown that he had done aught for the convicted man.

Stooping, he lifted Mary to her feet and directed her movements to a chair.

"Be reassured!" he gently said. "Am I a savage that it should be necessary for a woman to speak with me on her bended knees? Be calm, child; be calm!—I will listen to you fairly. Let me hear of this unfortunate young man, and of you. Tell me all; tell me how you came to know him, and what you do know of him."

There are times when all does not lay in the words which fall from the lips. Otis Hallowell had said but little, yet Mary did feel reassured. There was that in his voice which told of friendly sympathy, and nothing else is stronger.

She told the story plainly. Under any other condition she would not have divulged, much less dwelt upon a secret which was too sacred for others to listen to, but now—now, all was at stake, and she was eager to show how well she knew Curtis; how noble she knew him to be.

She told the story, and Hallowell listened with the keenest attention. Not a word did he lose, and if his eyes had echoed the voice of his heart they would more than once have been tear-dimmed.

What a love she revealed! How the base and sordid things of life shrunk away in the presence of such devotion!

He saw that time, nor disgrace, nor jury's verdict could crush out her affection, and he felt like taking her in his arms and blessing her for her devotion to that unfortunate prisoner of the Tombs.

He did nothing of the kind. Deeply as he was moved he still saw his own position. Her chances of getting his open sympathy were

fewer than if he had been no more than the judge—it made it impossible for him to express sympathy of radical kind when he had so much to conceal.

Still, he could comfort her in a measure.

"I think," he observed, anon, "that Curtis's lawyer has taken steps to secure a new trial."

"Yes, but if you would speak a word for Mr. Curtis—"

"The new plea will go to just men."

"But your influence—"

"Would not change law or evidence."

"It would do more than either, if you were to go to the other judges who must hear the case."

Hallowell had already thought of that, but he dared not say so.

"Let us hope for the best."

"But there is no new evidence, and there can be nothing better unless you act."

Hallowell shook his head.

"Oh! do not say No!" Mary cried. "I will not go away with the refusal! Promise me you will do what I ask; it is only to use your influence for him!"

"I am only a blind instrument of Justice—"

"Speak not the word!" Mary exclaimed; "there is no justice in the law which dooms a man on circumstantial evidence!"

"You are not wholly wrong."

"Act; do something; save him, or I shall go mad!"

There did seem danger of it. Not before had she given way to her feelings so much, but now she was with the judge, even she saw how feeble was the plea under which she sought relief. With no evidence in Curtis's favor, she endeavored to make an officer of law upset the whole machinery of his department for her sake.

"Be calm," Hallowell urged, a world of tenderness in his voice. "All is not yet lost. The plea for a new trial may be acted upon favorably. Do not give up your hopes. Your lawyer, Mr. Pollard, is a shrewd and persevering man—Yes, yes; he is all of that!" cried the judge, glad to have found one thing to say which did not smack of evasion and indifference, "and he will do what he can. Be hopeful, for I think there is hope. Who knows what the new trial will bring forth?"

"But will there be one?"

"Quite probably."

"Will you aid?"

"I will go over all the evidence again."

"And then?"

"I will help if I can see an atom of chance."

Mary had been prepared for utter refusal, and this unexpected good fortune touched her deeply. She dropped on her knees at the judge's feet again, and covered his hands with kisses before he could withdraw them.

"Heaven bless you!—Heaven bless you forever!" she cried, brokenly.

It was a painful experience for him. His heart ached for the girl. She knew not of the bond of sympathy between them, and knew not how glad he would have been to have given his promise freely and unreservedly; knew not that all she felt was echoed in his mind, and his grief made the stronger because he had been doomed to sentence his own son to an ignominious death.

Mary felt that she had trespassed all she could on his time, and now prepared to depart. He re-echoed the promise to examine the evidence fully and see if there was perceptible hope, and she was moved with gratitude.

As she neared the parlor door it was on her lips to apologize for intruding upon him, but the speech was cut short by a circumstance she could not but regard as singular.

"I shall be glad to have you come again, child," the judge remarked.

What power the words had!

Her face flushed.

"May I?"

"Most decidedly. Let me see you often, for I—I have a feeling for your trouble."

It was not the most definite of remarks, but the tone could not be misunderstood.

"I thank you, and I will come gladly," she hastened to say. "I thank you for your kindness—May God bless you!"

He accompanied her to the door, and she went out into the night.

He returned to the parlor and stood looking at vacancy while the hands of the clock moved on many a space.

"May she come?" he murmured. "May one come whose sorrows are my sorrows, come to see me? Ah! I only wish I could talk with her as I should be glad to; I wish I could seek sympathy from her as she does from me! But I cannot; my secret will not bear the light of day, and I must hide it and fight a lonely fight. But she shall have my sympathy, for not only does she love the boy, but she is of noble mind. How different from the woman I first loved!"

Hallowell sighed at the thought.

Mary was kind, thoughtful, considerate and true; Salome had been perverse, heedless of the feelings of others, selfish and unreliable, moved as she was by the spirit of the hour.

But it was not long the judge thought of that. Mary's coming and her request had given more color and more haste to a plan Hallowell had had in his mind. Curtis's case would go to

another judge on the appeal. What would be the result?

There was no new evidence, as far as he knew, and the appeal could be made only on technicalities. Doubtless, his own course as a presiding justice would be criticised. He tried to think wherein he might have made an unfair discrimination against Curtis, but saw none.

It was a peculiar fact that since he had sat down on the bench, no decision of his had been over-ruled, and he feared it would be sustained now.

"Then where is the ground for hope?" he thought. "How can a new trial be secured?"

He shook his head at the prospect. If he had felt no personal interest he would have said it was out of the question, but he could not say it now.

"There must be a new trial!" he declared, with feverish energy.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WATER WOLF AT WORK.

THE gray light of dawn was slowly making itself felt along the piers of the Metropolis. Darkness was being pushed back by the power of the sun, and the artificial lights flickered dimly over the wide stretch of land from the Battery northward.

A boat came along the river so close to the docks that each pier-head almost grazed the craft as it slowly moved southward.

In the boat was one man. He was a brawny fellow, with the muscle to pull the heaviest boat ever handled by a solitary rower, and he handled his charge without any trouble.

As he went he used his eyes well, and a sudden start, presently, told of some discovery.

He checked all motion of the boat, looked more keenly, and then propelled it into a dock.

Something there had caught his attention, and he rowed toward it with eagerness. It was a thing which floated on the surface of the water, and with a peculiarity which not many landmen know. The motion was not new to the boatman, and he did not hesitate in any respect. Straight to the object he went, and at the moment he arrived a fanciful surge of the water upturned a human face—the face of a dead man.

He who had come was not affected by such a slight thing, and after a quick glance around to see if he was observed, he, seeing no sign to that effect, thrust his hand into the pocket of the drowned person and sought for plunder.

There was not much there. Perhaps some other blood-sucker had been before him, or the dead man may have died as poor as he was now; at any rate, only a few coins rewarded the searcher. He secured these, but looked very much dissatisfied when he saw his search was not to be better rewarded.

His work done he stayed for nothing. His oars dipped water again, and he was moving out of the dock when a voice suddenly sounded:

"Hallo, Benjamin!"

The robber of the dead almost fell out of his craft.

Anxiously he turned his gaze upward. On the pier stood a man, and one he recognized immediately.

"You're a gay boy, Briny Ben," added the speaker. "You believe in making hay while the sun is just getting ready to shine, I see. Better than the old way, by far. How did your harvest pan out?"

Ben Wolf could have cursed the meddler with great good will, but he dared not. He recognized the man who had been introduced to him by Duncan Davies as Dan Murphy, and he was not glad to have anybody get clue to his secret ways.

"Suppose you take me in, Benjamin?" Dan went on.

The Water Wolf hesitated, but only for a moment. He was in for a bad job. He had been caught in work he would not have known, but, since it was so, the safest of all ways seemed to be to comply with the request. If he left Dan, the latter would not only be angry, but would be on the scene, and have the power to prove any charge he might make in his anger.

Suddenly he put the boat back and took the passenger aboard.

"Longshore work pays well, eh?" smiled Dan Murphy.

The only reply to the significant remark was a surly glance and Ben gave all his attention to the use of the oars. He was anxious to get out of sight before others could see him.

Robbing of the dead was not one of his regular means of support, but he disdained no end which helped him along, except honest labor. His occupation of the morning was one which carried the seeds of trouble along with it, and it was best to be careful.

Dan Murphy waited patiently, and when they were well out in the stream he added:

"I judge the sort of craft you unload most, as a 'longshoreman,' is in the way of flotsam."

"Critter," answered Briny Ben, sullenly, "I have known men to judge too much."

"Meaning me?"

"Ef you want ter take it, yes."

"Do you think I object to what you did?"

"Do ye?"

The Water Wolf rested on his oars as he spoke, and, leaning forward, regarded his companion in a menacing manner.

Unmoved, Dan Murphy calmly made response:

"I should be a fool if I did. I am myself engaged in work this blessed minute, so to speak, which I should not want the world to know—ay, not even you, Ben. Can one happy-go-lucky liver object if another gets his bread-and-butter in a fashion not popular with the law-and-order forces?"

Dan smiled lightly, but Ben was not easily convinced. He inwardly cursed the hour when Duncan Davies brought Dan to his home, but it was too late to think of that, now.

"Ef you hold yer tongue it's all right."

"I shall, Ben."

"That feller in the dock was done with his cash. Why hadn't I ez good right to et as anybody else?"

"That's logic."

"You ain't no better than any one else!" suddenly cried the Wolf.

"Who said I was?"

"I know ye, anyhow, an' I wouldn't trust ye the length o' yer nose!"

"You put it wrong, Ben. I admit all you allege except the last part. I am not in the habit of going back on a friend. I have done no business with you, and couldn't betray you if I would; but this you can set down as fact: I am mum when I hold a secret."

"I hope you be."

Ben did not speak as if he was sure of it, but he saw he would gain nothing by saying more on that head. He dropped a part of his sullen manner, and gave all his attention to the rowing of the boat.

It was not far to his haven, and in due time he landed both himself and Dan Murphy. The latter had thought it possible that he would get an invitation to breakfast, but the Water Wolf did not see fit to take him to his heart just because he had discovered a secret dangerous to the boatman's welfare.

They talked on the pier for some time, and then Ben said he must leave and did so, first bidding Dan a half-hearted adieu.

Dan watched him move off.

"I don't seem to be winning my way to Benjamin's heart as I could wish. I'll swear he don't suspect I am Claxton, the detective, or that I am an enemy, but he is careful enough so he don't want anybody to share his secrets. Cunning Ben! You may be able to keep this thing up, and then, again, you may not."

The detective was reluctant to accept his rebuff, but there was no help for it, and he walked away all the more determined to win in the end. He had Davies in the toils, as far as having his confidence was concerned, and it was only a matter of time, he thought, when Ben would come around.

He had read Ben fairly well in some respects, but not in all, as the sequel proved.

When the boatman reached his room he had a long and serious period of meditation. He did not like the fact that Dan had seen him rob the body. He judged other men by himself, and felt that his secret was not safe. If it was not, he needed to do something about it.

The result of his deliberations was that he went out, after breakfast, and walked to where Davies had told him Dan Murphy lived.

It was a small, so-called hotel of reputation none too savory.

Ben was around the place for an hour or more. Then he went away and spent the day in other pursuits.

Late that evening he returned to the hotel, or its vicinity, and hung around until it became quiet. He had noticed that there was one point next to the rear yard which had a low addition, or ell, and he was also aware this was close to the room occupied by Dan.

When the proper time seemed to have come he made an effort to enter the hotel unseen. He was wholly successful in the attempt, and passed through without encountering any inmate.

After that it was not hard to gain the roof of the addition, and he did so with rare skill for one of his weight. Fairly up, he paused and watched and listened. The window of Dan Murphy's room showed no light, nor was there anything to indicate the presence of a human being inside. All this pleased Ben. He believed Dan was asleep, and desired such a state of affairs devoutly.

He went to the window.

He raised the lower sash.

He listened again carefully.

Nothing was to be heard.

Then with increased care he crept into the room and stood on the floor where he could retreat or advance, as circumstances seemed to demand.

From the window at the other side of the place some light struggled in from a street-lamp. It fell on the foot of the bed. It did not reveal what he would have been glad to see. The covers looked too trim by far for the presence of a sleeper.

Disappointment crossed his face.

Hesitating awhile, he then crept forward with

great caution and reached the bed. He found his worst fears realized: there was no one there.

Growing some unintelligible comment he went to the gas-fixture and boldly made a light. It gave him view of the whole room. He saw nothing whatever of interest. He had everything to himself, and that was just what he did not want.

"Where is the critter?" he grumbled. "Does he keep night-owl hours?"

His wandering gaze rested upon a slip of paper on the table, and he went to see what it was. Several lines were written in a free hand, and he read as follows:

"Have gone away for the time. Will return Wednesday or Thursday.

"D. MURPHY."

Briny Ben flung the paper down viciously.

"Just like the confounded critter. Gone when he ought ter be here, an' all my fun gone, too. Durn the luck! It's about what I always get. I'd like ter swap luck with a blind mule. But I wonder what he's left?"

Another instinct began to prevail, and the boatman began a survey of the room to see if and plunder was at hand. He found but little of it; Dan did not have a very extensive wardrobe, and all other things were equally scarce.

Five minutes' search convinced him there was nothing which would repay the risk of carrying off, and he gave up the idea.

"Left, all around!" he growled, as he started toward the window.

With all the speed which was consistent with safety he retreated as he had come.

He had not fairly left the addition when the door which led from the room to the hall opened and Chief Claxton came in quietly.

"Good-night, Ben!" he murmured. "If there were not greater things at stake I would see you, now, but it must be postponed. Next time you go on such a raid, don't be so free in asking servants as to where my room is. If you do, your errand may get suspected, as it did this time."

Satisfied that the boatman would not return, the detective lighted a cigar and sat down to enjoy it.

"Benjamin is dangerous!" he commented. "I can't believe he suspects my trade or identity, but he is sore on my discovery of the morning. He don't want partners in his secrets, and if I judge this night raid aright, he would have slain me in bed if I had been there—and asleep. Ben is dangerous!"

The comment was as quietly made as if he had had no earthly cause to fear the big Water Wolf, but this did not mean he was deaf to the warning voice.

"Ben," he decided, "I shall keep on in the very course I have marked out, and if I can keep you from killing me, I think we shall be good friends, yet. But I know your way, now, Ben; I know your way!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PRISONER OF THE TOMBS.

THE night was dark, and the warden at the Tombs was seated in his private office, thinking what a miserable time it was to be patrolling the city and defending it from evil-doers.

A note was brought to him.

"Show the gentleman in!" he quickly directed.

And in a few seconds Judge Otis Hollowell entered.

"My dear sir, I am delighted to see you!" the warden exclaimed. "I am almost dying of the blues, and your help will get me out of the rut, if you intend to stay with me."

"I have come to smoke with you, Mr. Warden. Try one!"

The last words referred to the handful of cigars the judge extended, and the official did not refuse the chance presented. Both secured a "light," and then they sat down to smoke and talk. Hollowell was in his coolest mood, as far as could be seen, and he had never been a better companion.

He took the bulk of the conversation upon himself, and entertained the prosaic warden as only a man of genius and ideas can.

It was half an hour later when he approached the subject of his call. Yawning, he carelessly asked:

"How is Curtis, your prisoner?"

"He's in good health, and I must say he's the nerviest man I ever saw with us. No brag or bluster, but simply courage of the best sort."

"Bears up well, eh?"

"Yes."

"Probably thinks he will get a new trial."

"He never has said so."

"Doesn't he get downcast at all?"

"Not for a moment, as far as one can see. But it's pure and simple nerve, sir, for he must see how he stands. Oh! you can rest assured he is not satisfied, really, or even hopeful. Grit, judge; grit is the name of it!"

"Really, I would like to see this man."

"Why don't you?"

"Can it be done?"

"Of course."

"It must be in private, then. When I saw him before he was asleep, you know, and as the

hour was so late there was nobody about to tell of the matter. I wouldn't care to have any one but you know of this, warden."

"It shall all be on the dead quiet, sir; I'll see to it that nobody knows of it now but you and me."

"Good! I'll go in and see him. Arrange it at once, will you?"

The first step had been taken without publicity, and the care of the official made all else easy. He went away, only to return soon after with the information that the coast was clear, and that he had duly notified Curtis of the honor in store for him.

"I'll see that no keeper gets in your way, judge," added the warden, obsequiously.

Hollowell extended his thanks, and went to the cell with the valuable aid. The warden unlocked the door, and then retreated judiciously.

The judge entered the cell.

The prisoner had been seated, but he rose with the air of one doing the honors of his own home.

"Good-evening, sir," he gracefully said.

"Thanks to the warden, I am able to offer you a reasonably comfortable chair, and it is at your service."

Hollowell replied in a firm, clear voice, and took the chair. Then the prisoner himself sat down on the edge of the cot.

"We meet under different circumstances than when we were last together," the visitor remarked.

"Yes, sir; this is not the court-room."

"Did you expect, then, to be here now?"

"If you mean to ask whether I expected the trial to result as it did, I will say that, being innocent, I at first expected to be cleared without trouble, but as the work went on, and the array of circumstances hemmed me in tighter and tighter, I decided it would go against me. It did!"

"And then?"

"Then you did your duty."

"As I remember it, you took it all coolly."

"I was innocent!"

Homer Curtis had spoken with unfailing calmness, and even now there was no more in his manner. There was nothing of the theatrical display in his manner, and no attempt to influence his companion. Calm as if his life was not at stake, he made the assertion evenly.

"You expect a new trial, I suppose?"

"I am told that Judge Hollowell's decision and rulings are rarely, or never, over-ruled."

"But you retain hope?"

"All men do while there is hope. It is the way we are made, and a precaution to make us hold to the life we have."

"Can you in no way establish your innocence?"

"You know how we tried at the trial."

"There is nothing new?"

"Nothing."

"You are reputed to be a very cool prisoner."

"Nothing is to be gained by dejection. It will be time to give up all when all is surely lost."

"Suppose all proves to be lost?"

"Then I will try to die like a man."

Calmly the statement was made, and the judge felt like seizing the hand of the prisoner. Such magnificent, unassuming courage was enough to arouse all his sympathy and admiration under all circumstances.

"You still assert you are innocent?"

"Emphatically, yes!"

Curtis looked the questioner in the face with a gaze which never wavered.

All through this talk the judge had been eying the young man critically. He had been trying to read his very soul, as it were, and what he did read was in Curtis's favor. At all times the latter met his gaze, not defiantly or with an effort, but with that nameless something which indicates the honest man, free from secrets he may wish to hide.

If Hollowell admired his great nerve he also began to feel he was with an innocent man, but the thing of all things was that cool, unassuming courage.

This quality had always been imputed to himself.

Was it the illustration of the old saw that "blood will tell?"

Hollowell was beginning to feel keenly for the prisoner, and with the awakening of his sympathies and admiration came with renewed force the question: Was he, indeed, the son of the visitor?

For some time longer Hollowell dwelt upon the subject, but he had come with another object, and he soon mentioned it abruptly:

"I think I have never heard the story of your life?"

"It was not mentioned at the trial."

There was an evasion in the reply, as Hollowell well saw, but he did not allow it to abash him.

"It is apparent to me that you are of good rank in life."

"That depends upon what you mean. I was reared under humble circumstances, and can claim no more than that there was honor in the home. There was no ceremonious form; no wealth, and no mingling in so-called polite society."

"Would you mind giving me a sketch of your life?"

Curtis gazed somewhat wonderingly at the questioner.

"Why should I?" he inquired, bluntly.

"There is a movement on foot to secure a new trial for you, and your lawyer has mentioned it to me. If there is to be a fight to save you, a friendly turn from me may not do you any harm, but I do not like to work in the dark."

"Of course not."

"I am sincerely anxious to do you a good turn, if I can, Mr. Curtis."

"I should be foolish to refuse your kind offer, and though I should not comply with every one, the reputation of Judge Hollowell is well known to me," gracefully replied the prisoner.

"At least, what you may say will not be used to your injury."

"Enough! You shall hear my story, which may be told, as far as I know it, in few words. What I don't know might require much time in the telling."

There was something in the speaker's manner which suggested that the shadow of the past had been over him in some way, and Judge Hollowell waited eagerly for the recital. For the first time Curtis's gaze fell. He looked away as if he were calling up the past out of the abyss of time. Presently he began:

"My earliest recollections are of living in a small town in Pennsylvania, on the banks of the Allegheny River."

The judge shut his lips tightly; it was on the bank of the Allegheny he had last seen his son.

"I was with two old people whom I called father and mother," Curtis added. "I supposed them to be my parents, and had no reason to believe otherwise until I was ten years old. One day a playmate declared I was not the son of the Ashtons—such was the name of the old couple."

"Child-like, I went to them with the story. They told me it was false, and that I was what they had claimed: that they were my parents."

"Shortly after we moved to a point near Philadelphia, and there we resided until I was sixteen. Then both Mr. Ashton and his wife fell ill of the same trouble. Both died. He was the last to succumb, and before the breath of life went out he called me to him and told a singular story."

"He confessed he was not my father, and from his lips I received all the news he could give of the past."

"I have said they lived near the river. I was a gift to them from the stream."

"One May day, fifteen years before, there was a freshet which amounted to a flood, and many people were drowned at various places along the river."

"No lives were lost where Mr. Ashton lived, but one was saved."

"In that time of disaster a mass of wreckage was thrown ashore almost at his door, and on the wreckage was a child of perhaps two years of age. The child was myself."

"There was nothing about me which told who I was, or whence I had come. Mr. Ashton asserted that due inquiry was made to get trace of my friends, but I have always doubted this. The Ashtons were old and childless. From certain things he let drop I suspect that, instead of trying with any degree of zeal to find my friends, they seized the chance to add to their household one whose helplessness appealed so strongly to their kind hearts."

"Be that as it may, nothing was learned."

"Mr. Ashton died. I did think of trying to trace my relatives, but I never made any stir, and the passage of time daily made success more doubtful."

"I never tried, and do not know to-day who I really am."

"Left alone, I came to New York and obtained a situation suited to my years in a mercantile house. I was as successful as was to be expected, and, starting on nothing, finally found myself with enough money saved to warrant my making an effort for myself. I went into partnership with Morris Strong. How that partnership ended the late trial has told you."

Curtis ceased speaking.

The judge had listened to all with rapt attention, and listened to be almost convinced. His mind was not now on Curtis's business venture, but on something else.

"You do not bear the surname of your benefactor," he reminded.

"No. I did not see why I should sail under false colors, and I dropped the name of Ashton, retaining only my first and middle names. Thus I became Homer Curtis."

"Do you not think you could even now trace your relatives?"

"It is possible."

"Do you not care to know of them?"

"Situated as I am now, I do not think they would care to hear of me," frankly answered the prisoner.

"Have you anything by which you could prove your identity?"

"Nothing, unless it is the clothes I had on when I was cast up by the flood."

"What did you wear?"

"I am not capable of telling in detail, but the one thing which I should select as the most prominent of all was a blue cloak, as an outer garment, which was fancifully trimmed and of very rich material. In fact, all I had on was fine and costly, from the point of view of a woman. I know but little of such matters. The cloak, however, was impressive."

Otis Hallowell saw the cloak in imagination as plainly as Curtis did. Well did he remember that Salome had purchased the material just before he saw her last, and that it was in process of manufacture when he went out of the house, himself, never to return.

He dared not ask how it was trimmed, of Curtis, but he had heard enough. The story, supplemented by the birthmark on the prisoner's arm, could not be otherwise than convincing.

It was as good as proven that Deborah had told the truth.

CHAPTER XVII. THE TIE OF BLOOD.

JUDGE HALLOWELL sat in silence. He had gone back in imagination to that time so far away when he had Salome and this son of his as his daily companions, and he thought with sorrow what the willfulness and temper of a woman had done.

If Salome had been different, what a difference it would have made in his life!

It might have made more than he was then thinking, for, in truth, Salome was not one whom he could have introduced to his own sphere in life, and her deficiencies would have been such a barrier to his career that it was open to doubt if he would ever have been a judge, or even a lawyer.

Small things change the current of many a life, and the perverseness of a woman may change everything in a career founded for life and eternity.

"Do you see aught in this which bears upon my case in court?"

Homer Curtis asked the question with a faint smile. It was not a serious inquiry, but made as if to break the lull.

The judge aroused almost with a start.

"Hardly that," he replied, "but you have interested me, nevertheless. Life is full of strange things. Your story— But it is one which must be subordinate, now, to other matters. As to your trial, I hope I did you no injustice in my decisions?"

There was almost a pleading look in the gaze of the speaker fixed upon his companion, but Homer readily replied:

"I consider that you used me very well, sir. I know what your position was, and feel that I had full justice from you."

"I thank you!"

There was more of feeling in the reply than was safe, and Hallowell suddenly realized it and took caution for his guide.

"I like to be just," he added. "Now, as to your application for a new trial. Has your lawyer hope?"

"He tells me so, but I have some doubt of it. That is—"

Hallowell understood the sudden pause.

"You have not said anything which will injure you, Mr. Curtis. I am not here as a spy, nor would I use aught confided to me thus to your hurt—"

"I am sure of it, sir!" Curtis hastened to say.

"You are quite right. Now, I seldom take any notice of the men or women who are before me for trial, further than is necessary to do my work properly, but circumstances—certain circumstances—have caused me to feel an interest in you. I confess I should be glad to see you shake off this incubus of alleged guilt. You are not of the stuff of which murderers are made, and I don't think you guilty."

"I am very grateful for your good words, sir."

"Practical effort is the test of assertion, and I will see if I can do something in the way of proof. Just now I can say but little, but there may be more later on."

"You are kind, and I will remember it in you, sir."

If a third party had been present he would have seen in the manner of the two, if not in their looks, a similarity both marked and suggestive. They had a way of speaking which was alike, and the courtesy of the elder man's way seem inborn with the younger. All this was striking in the light of recent discoveries.

Anon, Hallowell rose to go.

"I have a favor to ask of you," he said.

"I was not aware that I was in a position to do favors to any one," Curtis answered, smiling, "but I shall be pleased to hear from you."

"Refrain from mentioning my visit to any one!"

"Even from my lawyer?"

"Yes."

Curtis looked surprised.

"Why should I do that?"

"As a favor to me, and so I can help you. As a judge I am in singular work when I come here and offer my aid, and it is imperative that the fact be kept secret now and forever. I tell you but the truth when I say I am so placed

that my capabilities for helping you exceed those of any other person living, but my share in the work will have to be secret; a matter between you and myself, alone. Believe me, it is no idle remark when I say this."

"But to keep my lawyer in ignorance—"

"May mean your salvation!"

"What would he say?"

"What will he say if a new trial is granted you, without his knowing why it was done?"

Curtis looked quickly at the speaker. There was so much of meaning in the tone that he was moved without knowing why.

"As a judge, and for other reasons," added Hallowell, "I would not have it known I have been here for anything, but this I can say to you: I never gained an end by underhand work; I know whereof I speak; I give you my word of honor I mean you only good, and if my course may seem strange to you it is, believe me, the one which promises you the most of all that can be done for you. In return there is only this—no human being but yourself must know of this."

Standing erect, his fine form seen to the best advantage, the judge was an impressive sight, then. Something of this was visible to the prisoner, but there was more.

An unseen, mysterious, peculiar influence was upon Homer Curtis, and it was an impulsive decision wholly unlike himself when he abruptly exclaimed:

"It shall be as you say; I agree to all!"

"Well said! You shall not regret this."

It was hard for Hallowell to keep back other words which trembled on his tongue, but it was done. He must be of ice, outwardly; he must have assumed the part even if his reputation had been different, while as it was, it was a vital necessity.

He did not delay much longer. He had said all that was necessary, and he felt sure, more than prudence would allow.

It was time for him to go before he said more.

Father and son parted with a firm clasp of the hand. It was a situation with but few possible parallels, and to the judge it was touching. He held the hand of his son for the first time in many years, but the son was condemned to the gallows, and it was the father who had sentenced him.

Hallowell went out, and was soon in his cab and rolling homeward.

Unknown to him, another cab had followed him down to the Tombs, and it went back not far in the rear of his own vehicle. When it discharged its occupant, soon after he dismissed his driver, it was Edward Acton who alighted.

The judge entered the house, but he did not long delay below. Going to his own room he began to walk about and meditate.

The last doubt had gone from his mind, and he knew it was his son he had seen under such peculiar circumstances. Painful, indeed, was the situation. The young man was rescued from the grave, as it were, to be sent to the gallows—unless the machinery of law could be thwarted.

"It must be; it shall be!" Hallowell muttered. "There is no ground for a new trial, but it must be had. I'll see the other judges, and they must yield a point. They must grant a new trial— But what if they should refuse?"

The thought made him shiver.

They would have their reputations to consider, and to force the State to the expense of a new trial without any good reason was much to ask of a judge who might possibly ruin his career by the step.

"But it must be done!" Hallowell reiterated. He was all the more positive in his assertion because he knew that, at the best, it would be hard to carry his point, and he was afraid the effort would fail.

If it did fail—well, Homer Curtis was condemned to die on the gallows!

The judge felt that he had more of a task on hand than any one was capable of attending to with success.

He must save Curtis; he must manage with Salome and Deborah so that they would do no harm with their vicious tongues; and he must save his daughter, Alice, and her mother, so that no misery would come to them.

The last was the hardest task of all. What human being could act aright in the case?

"My poor Mirabel!" he murmured, "what may not be in store for you? Would to Heaven I had died before I ever met you! And yet, I never dreamed that Salome lived."

The next morning Edward Acton called on Chief Claxton.

"There is news," the latter quietly remarked. "I can read it in your face."

"News which does not please me!" declared Acton, gloomily, as he dropped heavily into a chair.

"Granted! You betray that. What is it?"

"You directed me to spy upon Judge Hallowell—"

"Ahem! To watch him, you mean?"

"Let us not bandy words. 'Spy' is a word all understand, and if the acts it implies, and the creature who does the spying, are alike de-

spised, it does not make it necessary to trifle with the English language when referring to the deeds growing out of it."

"Ahem! As you will. You said—"

"I have spied upon the judge."

"Well?"

"Last night he left the house, and I acted the spy upon him."

"Yes?"

"He went—"

Acton lost his bitterness of speech and leaned forward in some anxiety as he added:

"He went to the Tombs!"

"Ah!"

"What happened then I will leave you to judge. I don't know, but why in the world did he go there?"

Chief Claxton said nothing. He looked at the floor and meditated. Well aware as he was that one of many trivial errands might have been responsible for the call, he, like Acton, was prone to rush to one conclusion.

"Why," Edward added, "unless it was to see about Homer Curtis? You may think this a wild guess, but you have started my thoughts in certain channels, and if I am wrong I fail to see it. Did he go to see Homer?"

"Why should he?"

"True, why?"

"Unless we have some proof of the possibility, we should be absurd to think he was there with that object in view. Why should he go to see Curtis?"

Edward looked somewhat disappointed, for he rather wanted his theory sustained.

"We can get all this from Homer," he remarked. "If he did see him, it is easy to learn of it."

"Of course."

Claxton agreed readily, but he seemed singularly destitute of ideas, or not inclined to make them known. He was, in fact, so apparently indifferent that Acton waxed indignant.

"Have I sold my soul for nothing?" he demanded.

"Excuse me; I do not understand."

"After all I have done is it possible that it amounts to nothing?"

"It is not possible. It does amount to something. I have taken note of all you have said, and I regard it as important."

"What does it point to?"

"That I cannot tell until I have looked into it. Give me time, Mr. Acton; the world was not made in a minute."

"Have it as you will. I suppose I am unduly precipitate, but I'm eager to get the meat out of this kernel and have done with it. If I am to be despised, I want to get right at it, you see."

Claxton did not see fit to ask what his caller meant, but, seeing he was in such an unpleasant frame of mind, he did all he could to pacify him, and the interview wound up without more friction.

When Edward was safely out of the way, the detective prepared for the street in a leisurely way.

"I think I have a call to make!" he observed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MAN OF SILENCE.

MARY WOLF was seated in her home when a messenger brought her a note. She read it, and then put on her hat and went out. On a corner not far away she found Chief Claxton awaiting her.

"You are prompt," he remarked.

"The call was one I could not neglect," she answered quickly. "I hope you have news?"

"On the contrary, I am in search of news. What do you know about Homer Curtis's past life, in general?"

"Enough to know there is nothing in it he has occasion to hide!" was the quick reply.

"I am glad of that, for I am in search of information. Who and what is he?"

"What do you mean?"

"Where are his parents?"

"I don't know."

"You look guilty, if I may so express myself."

"What have they to do with his case?"

"Possibly, nothing; perhaps, much. You think there is nothing to hide, you say."

"I am sure of it, and though my judgment does not wholly approve of my course, I will answer as well as I can. If he has parents he does not know of it. In fact, he does not know who his parents were, or even what their names were."

"You interest me," said Chief Claxton, though he did not look as if he was interested in the least. "Tell me all about it."

Mary agreed, but she was so reluctant that it was not easy to get her started. When once under way she talked well, and to the point, and when she was done Claxton had the same story which had been told by the prisoner of the Tombs to Hallowell.

"I have complied with your request," added Mary, "but, as all his friends are dead, you will see that they could have no bearing on the case which has put him where he is."

"That is very true," Claxton, admitted, "and I beg your pardon for troubling you. I had thought there might be something in the past, however. As it is, no harm is done, Miss Wolf."

I will regard this as confidential, and you may rely upon my discretion."

There was not much more to be said, and he soon went his way. If Mary could have followed the drift of his mind she would have changed her opinion of the importance of the interview.

The detective was puzzled, but he knew he had found something worthy of more attention. He summed the situation up.

"Deborah has means of getting money, apparently by means of blackmail. Hollowell visits her, and then she is suddenly flush. Hollowell goes to see Curtis in the Tombs—if he does. Now, I learn that Curtis doesn't know who his father is. What does all this imply?"

He thought on the subject carefully, but gained no light beyond what his first impressions had been. This encouraged him. An idea that held was worth looking into.

He ended by going to a certain police officer of the city. This man had moved in the same circle as Otis Hollowell, at one time, but he had been less lucky in seeking a high position in his business life, and had wound up in a different station.

Claxton knew his history well, and to him he went.

Taking his time he brought conversation around to the desired subject without giving clue to his motive, and they spoke of Hollowell as a judge.

"By the way, I believe you knew him early in life?"

"We were schoolmates."

"Was he the same sort of person in his youth?"

"Very much the same."

"Never wild or dissipated?"

"No."

"I can well imagine it. Such a man would drink wine like an iceberg, and woo a woman in the same fashion."

"Oh! he was social, but always prudent."

"Ever married more than once?"

"No."

Chief Claxton began to feel that he was booked for a failure.

"Has he always lived in New York?"

"Yes. Wait a bit! Now you speak of it, I believe he did have a little touch of human weakness at one time. He left home when nineteen or twenty, and was gone three or four years. His father was not the easiest man to get along with in the world, and as Otis had means of his own, he just packed up and got out. Nobody ever has known where he passed those years, as far as I am aware."

The detective did a little figuring to see when the time was that Hollowell was thus absent.

"What do you suppose he did with himself?"

"I have no idea. We asked him when he returned, but he was as silent as the grave. We gained no clue whatever. His taciturnity made comment, and I remember that one of our number suggested there was a woman in it, but if there was he did not say so."

Claxton was duly observant.

"Why was the notion of a woman mentioned?"

"Because he would tell nothing, got even where he had been all the while, and we could not think of any other cause for such taciturnity."

"There may have been a woman."

"Yes, I suppose he had a heart, like other folks."

"He went all alone?"

"Yes."

"And nobody knows more about it than you?"

"I know of no one. If Hollowell had aught to conceal, you may rely upon it he told no one."

There was no more to be gleaned, and the detective went his way.

"A woman in it!" he murmured. "Was it a close shot? Was there a woman in it?"

If there was, Claxton did not see the way clear to learn the fact immediately. He did, however, see one thing which must be done. He went to Lawyer Pollard, and made known a desire to see Curtis in his cell at once, and the two went together.

The sentenced man received them with his peculiar air of hospitality which prison walls could not lessen. This time Claxton sprung his point abruptly.

"I understand Judge Hollowell has been to see you?"

It came without warning, and Curtis was not proof against the assault. His face flushed, and he showed signs of guilt. It was but a transient weakness, and what followed proved how well Claxton had proceeded in gaining this much by his stratagem.

"That who has been here?"

Curtis asked the question after a brief pause, and his manner was full of what seemed to be surprise.

"Judge Hollowell."

The prisoner made a gesture of repugnance.

"Your jest is ill-timed."

"Do you deny that he has been here?"

"The question is absurd. Why should he come to see the man he has sentenced? Judges are usually ready to sentence, but they do not care to face their victims unless the awful

shadow of the bench is between their precious bodies and safety."

It was the first murmur, the first sign of bitterness Pollard ever had heard from his client's lips; and even Claxton knew him well enough to be aware that the assault on the officers of law was forced and unfelt.

"We speak only for your good when we mention the fact of his visit. Rest assured of that."

"Who has informed you so strangely?"

"That I cannot tell."

"I thought not."

Pollard looked very much bewildered, as he had not been taken into the secret.

"If there has been anything of the kind, Curtis, you want to tell of it. At this moment Claxton is the best friend you have, for he is the man who is seeking to save you."

"I am well aware of that, and if there was anything I could do, I would attend to it."

"Do you assert that Hollowell has not been here?"

Sharply Claxton asked the question, but there was no wavering on the part of the prisoner.

"He may have been when I was asleep, but I can't say I have seen him, myself."

"You 'can't' say it. Do you mean you will not?"

"This grows unpleasant. I am very reluctant to discuss a point where we do not advance, and where no good seems likely to come of it. Why should I blind myself to my own good? Why should I keep my friends from helping me? I am not blind to my own interests."

The detective was staggered. He could not but see that Curtis had not directly said that the judge had not been there, but if there was an evasion in his form of expression, it was clear nothing would be gained by persistence. If evasion there was, the strength of character of the man was not to be shaken.

"The future may prove you are blind!" Claxton retorted, "but you can have it your own way. I am not going to force you to be saved."

Curtis could not help wavering. It was hard to refuse a reasonable request to those engaged and paid to act for him, but he would not go contrary to the pledge given to Judge Hollowell.

Pollard took the subject up, though all in the dark, but a glance from Claxton caused him to abandon it speedily.

"One thing more," pursued the detective, presently. "Have you never had any idea of whom Morris Strong purchased the stolen goods sold in your store?"

"Not the least."

"You saw no one hanging around?"

"Not to my recollection."

"And saw Strong in secret conversation with nobody?"

"No."

"Do you know Ben Wolf?"

"I may say No to that. I met Ben at the house, and tried to be on good terms with him. I failed so signally that he ordered me to keep away, and my meetings with Mary were far from his residence. In brief, Wolf did not take a fancy to me, nor I to him, so we kept apart."

"Do you think him honest?"

"Even Mary doubts that. His pretense of being a 'longshoreman' is not deceptive to many who do know him, but how he lives I know not."

"Never saw anything to indicate he was a river thief?"

Curtis looked thoughtful.

"No; but it might have been so and I be none the wiser. I saw him so little I know nothing of him. If you mean to ask if he could have sold the goods to Strong I will say I never saw him about the premises, or in any way where I could gain ground for the belief that he might be concerned in it."

"He goes out much in his boat."

"Yes."

"And gets his living while gone."

"I suppose so," Curtis admitted thoughtfully.

"And at night?"

"Do you suspect him of being a river thief?"

"Frankly, I do," and Claxton half-smiled as he remembered the time he had ridden in the Water Wolf's boat.

The prisoner was silent for several minutes, and so deeply so that he did not hear when he was addressed by Pollard. Suddenly he exclaimed:

"Now you bring the subject up I remember that Strong used to go to a place on a pier near Canal street—I do not recall the exact place—and talk with a fisherman. At least, so he said in answer to a question of mine. This man he represented as one whom he used to go fishing with when he was younger, and he claimed to have kept up acquaintance for the sake of the stories the old man told. He asked me to go there, but I could not attend to it at the time, and I never went. Could the old fisherman have been concerned in this matter?"

"Well, unless you can be more definite we are not likely to know."

"I can; his name was Oakes, or so Strong claimed."

"Possibly he can be found."

"Strong said he was well known."

"I'll try it."

"This is my first thought of the matter for some time, but recollections come fast now they are started."

There was more he thought of, but, though it might amount to something, there was nothing which would indicate that a valuable clue had been found. Claxton thought it worth looking into, and there they rested.

Shortly after the visitors left the cell.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DECISIVE MOVE.

CHIEF CLAXTON did not fail to look into the case of the man Oakes mentioned by Curtis. He went to the patrolman on the beat where the suspected person lived.

"Know him?" the patrolman repeated. "Oh! yes; I know him well. By that I don't mean there is any intimacy between us, though he is one of those fellows who are always seeking the company of a policeman—a class who may be set down as having schemes in mind so that they think it prudent to keep solid with the officer. A man without any cause to fear the law never tries to make free and friendly with a patrolman."

"Then you think Oakes has such schemes in mind?" Claxton asked.

"I make no charges, because I know nothing against him, but he has been mighty friendly with me."

"What's his business?"

"Calls himself a retired fisherman."

"Do you doubt it?"

"I have no cause to. To put it quick and simple, he is one of the apparently idle persons who may be all right and may not."

"Does he go out on the water much?"

"Occasionally. Can't say he goes 'much.'"

"Where is his home?"

"Yonder."

The officer indicated a plain old wooden house which fronted the piers.

"Who has he with him?"

"I don't know of anybody. He keeps house for himself."

"Do you mean that he occupies all that building, alone?"

"As far as I know, he does, but he tells me it is not fit for any one to live in. He says the floors are unsafe, and he lives there at some risk, himself."

Claxton looked at the house doubtfully. It surely was old enough to make the assertion plausible on the surface, but he did not believe it, nevertheless.

"Is he abroad much at night?"

"I am not here, and the patrolman who had the beat for some years died only last week."

"Ever see Oakes with men who own boats?"

"He's with them about all the time."

"Do you know a man called Briny Ben?"

"He's one that Oakes herds with. I know Ben by sight, and once spoke with him, but he's a surly chap and I never had a chance to get really acquainted with him, even if I had wished."

Claxton had struck a vein of more than passing interest, and he pursued it with patience. Many questions he asked about Briny Ben and his association with Oakes, but there was not much to be developed. He came to see Oakes, and the two were friendly, but there was nothing gained from the officer which would indicate guilty connection between the watermen.

The detective hung around until he had view of Oakes.

He proved to be a stout, hearty specimen of humankind, but his lack of real intelligence would have been a bar to the theory that he was a receiver of, and dealer in, stolen goods, had it not been for the expression of cunning on his rough face. That made up for more refined intelligence, such as one would look for in an ally of thieves and disposer of their goods.

Claxton continued on. He knew others must know something of Oakes, and in the most careful way he went about getting the desired information.

He was not so successful as he hoped, but the idea grew upon him more and more that Oakes was not the man to be able to live in seeming idleness without some source of income.

In the afternoon the suspected man went out in a boat with a stranger, and the detective made a resolution.

There might be no time to apply for a search-warrant, so he took the only visible means of getting at the desired end, which was to see the interior of the building.

He had seen that the rear was particularly susceptible of attack without danger of discovery, and he went around and made an investigation of the window nearest at hand.

It was fastened, but he was not to be filled. He forced the sash up, and was soon inside.

Evidently, it had been a long time since the house had been occupied in a regular way. The furniture was still there, but it had been given no attention. As a rule dust covered it thickly, and dirt was on the floor so deeply that every footprint showed as if in snow.

Losing no time, he went over the whole premises. He did not expect to find evidence flaunted before his eyes, and in this he was not disappointed. When he looked for hidden evi-

dence there was disappointment. He could get trace of no secret receptacle, and all his efforts went for nothing.

This did not disturb him, and the fact that Oakes had the whole house to himself when he kept up the role of a poor man counted for more than what was not to be found.

When the detective went home he did some thinking, and the result was the determination to do a bold stroke of work.

He did not know on what ground he could apply for the arrest of the suspected man, so he determined to take the power into his own hand.

The result of this determination was seen in the events of the night.

Waterman Oakes retired early, and was soon asleep. Perhaps he slept the sleep of innocence, and had nothing to worry him. Be that as it may, his rest was broken rudely before the dawn of day. At some period of the night he was awakened by an unnatural sound in his room. He turned over and listened.

"What's that?" he muttered, sleepily.

All was still.

"Mebbe a rat."

The theory did not satisfy him, but he was not timid enough to be worried. Deciding in his sleepy way that it was not worth looking into, he began to fall into slumber again. Then the "rat" moved once more; he took a grip on Oakes's throat.

The latter became wide awake in an instant.

He tried to rise, but a strong hand held him back.

"Be still!" ordered an unseen person. "Utter one word of alarm and you are a dead man!"

Oakes gasped for breath.

"Mercy!" he exclaimed, as well as was possible with the hold on his throat.

"That depends on yourself. Be still and you live; resist, or give an alarm, and you die!"

"I am mum."

"Remember it!"

"Ef you've come here fer plunder you've come ter the wrong shop; a burglar would starve on what I hev fer keepin'."

There was a brief pause; then the unknown speaker asked:

"Where are the stolen goods?"

"What stolen goods?"

"You are a 'fence.' Where is your plunder?"

"Thunder! I ain't got any. This is the first I ever heard of sech a thing."

"Why will you lie to me?"

"I ain't lyin'."

"Tell me the truth; own up; and you shall not be molested. It's not you we are after, but some one else. Save yourself, man, and be wise. I promise you freedom from arrest if you'll tell the truth. We want to touch the receivers of the stolen goods; not the thieves. Will you save yourself?"

"I don't know a thing you're talkin' about, an' I ain't had no hand in sech work. I'm no fence, an'—"

"Silence him!"

Before Oakes could understand the import of the order some sort of covering was slipped over his mouth, and his last chance to call out was gone. Once more he struggled, but that, too, was too late.

Ropes were tied on his ankles and wrists, and he was promptly lifted from the bed.

He was a man of courage, but this sort of treatment worried him. He judged others by himself, and was of the opinion that he was in a very bad way. He was sorry he had not taken chances while he could, and made an outcry, but his resolution was not in date.

He was lifted and borne away—where he could not tell, but in a short time the fresh air which struck his face told that they were out of doors. Then he was bundled into a vehicle and the latter moved away.

Oakes gurgled and groaned, trying to get his captors to take some notice of him, but he worked in vain. Not a word was spoken to him, and a ride of what seemed to him a long while ensued.

Finally the carriage stopped; he was lifted out and carried into a building, and in due time the muffer was removed from his eyes and mouth. Power of sight and speech was thus restored to him. He looked and saw before him a man who wore a mask which was so effective that he could tell nothing of what was behind it.

Only two gleaming eyes told of life back of the mask. He thought them very bright and menacing.

Then sounded a voice:

"You see to what your obstinacy has brought you!"

Stern and hostile was the beginning.

"I ain't ter blame," remonstrated Oakes.

"You are wholly to blame, for if you had used reason, things would have been very much different. Even now, however, your case is not hopeless. You can have one last chance to save yourself. What do you know about the late Morris Strong?"

The speaker leaned forward as he asked the question, and his keen eyes were used to the utmost. He had no reason to complain of the result. Oakes's jaw dropped and he betrayed guilt in every way. The shot had gone home.

His companion gave him ample time to reply, but the sharp regard never was turned from his face.

He tried to rally, and finally found his tongue.

"I never heard o' sech a man."

"Why will you lie to me?"

"I ain't lyin'—"

"You sold stolen goods to Strong. Why will you be so stupid? If you would save yourself, don't try to save too many others along with you. Own up! Nobody is trying to do you harm, and you will be given proof of it if you are sensible. Confess, and I promise you freedom from arrest and prosecution."

"Ef I had anything ter tell I would do it, but I ain't got the least idee what you mean. I ain't handled no stolen goods—"

"Fool! are you bound to go on to ruin?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"I say you sold stolen goods to Morris Strong, and I am going to make you confess it. You will never leave here until I have the truth from you. I tell you that you are not menaced if you own up; it is an attack on an entirely different party. You are safe if you speak out, but if you do not, this house will be a prison for you until your bones rust in your body from want of use."

The inexorable voice made Oakes feel very unpleasant, but he did not hesitate for a moment. If he was guilty of what was alleged against him, he was strong in the determination to hold his secret.

This the questioner saw, but the latter did not lose courage. With dogged persistence and keenness of words he pursued his attack, and the conversation went on. He found he had met his match. Now the first surprise was over Oakes gave no sign of guilt or weakness. If his companion was firm and dogged, so was he.

Finally the masked man rose.

"You have chosen your path, and you can follow it while you wish, but of this be assured: you will never leave here until you do confess, and every hour of delay will make your position all the worse. I am going to have the facts about your connection with Morris Strong, if I keep you here at starvation pitch until your flesh goes to join the goods you stole."

"I can't tell what I don't know."

"You will tell what you do."

"Mebbe!"

"Or starve."

"I kin do that."

"You will, unless you talk. I'll see you again."

And masked Chief Claxton left the room.

CHAPTER XX.

A SPY WORKS WELL.

In the street near the house occupied by Deborah Paine and Salome, a man was waiting and watching. He was not a prepossessing-looking person, and he had not made himself more so by turning the collar of his coat up around his neck.

He had done this with a desperate effort at disguising himself, but it was not becoming to his style.

This man was Briny Ben.

His attention was on the house in which the two women named were residing, and it was plain he had some definite object in view. Deborah had refused to let him know where they lived, but he had been equal to the emergency, and had found out.

Now, he was none the more kindly disposed toward them because he had been obliged to learn without their being willing it should be so.

For a long while he had paced up and down the street, watching and waiting. He had been barred out of their secrets so thoroughly that he was determined to get at them if such a thing was possible; and to win more than they were willing to grant, if he was capable of it.

"Hullo! who's that?"

The Water Wolf muttered the question under his breath as he saw a man ascend the steps and ring the bell.

"Mebbe he ain't goin' ter see them, but I want ter find out. He is let in. I wonder who by?"

Ben was not able to tell, so he did the next best thing. He stood with his gaze glued upon the windows of the room he knew was occupied by Deborah and Salome, and he was not long kept waiting for evidence of the kind he craved. Suddenly the shadows of two persons were thrown upon the window-shade—one that of a woman; the other, that of a man.

"I have them!" the Water Wolf muttered.

"I knowed I could do it, an' I hev. The feller has gone ter see them, an' I'm no good ef I don't know who he is afore I go ter bed. Hal' old Deb, you can't fool Ben Wolf! He's enough fer you, with all yer cunnin'!"

And who had gone to the rooms of the two women?

When Deborah Paine learned that Judge Hallowell was below she had been quick to have him admitted, and it was their shadows Ben had seen on the shade.

"Do you want to see me or Salome?" Deborah asked.

"Both!"

Otis Hallowell answered tersely, and his face was stern and fixed. If the woman had not had such an overwhelming advantage she might have been awed by the power of the face, but she had as much courage as his own, and was full of confidence in her position.

"I will prepare Salome," she quietly replied.

Left alone, the judge paced back and forth until she came again. Then he entered Salome's room.

If she had moved since he saw her last there was nothing to tell of the fact. She seemed to sit exactly as she did before, and her expression was the same. Cold, fixed and severe, she showed no more of human emotion than the walls of the room.

Hallowell bowed slightly, but neither of them gave a formal greeting.

"I have come again," the judge remarked.

"I see you have," Salome admitted.

"Have you either anything more to say to me?"

"Why should we have?"

Deborah asked the question, and it was plain she was on the defensive until she knew just what he wanted.

"I didn't know but you might have."

"We have not."

Hallowell's gaze wandered to the younger woman. Again her face fascinated him unpleasantly. Its coldness and immovable severity were as impressive as they were unpleasant. How times had changed both her and himself! The fire of youth was gone, and gone so completely that a casual observer could see nothing left; but the judge had seen, on his former visit, that all the hot temper of the woman was but veiled.

There was a pause until he abruptly aroused.

"When I was here before," he said, "we spoke of the young man who is in the Tombs, condemned to death."

"Your son and Salome's," amended Deborah.

"We spoke of him," continued Hallowell.

"Can you say more of him?"

"In what way?"

"You know to what he is doomed."

"Death!"

Deborah answered coldly. The visitor regarded both women closely.

"Have you no pity for him?"

"As much as his father has, I think!" Salome retorted.

"Have you reason to believe me lacking in pity?"

"I don't know."

"Let us all prove our gifts in that way. You have shown yourselves well informed as to the prisoner I have named. What do you know of the crime for which he has been condemned?"

"Nothing."

"I do not believe he committed the deed, but some one did. Do you know who it was?"

"No."

"Remember it will not alter our relations of money giver and money seekers if he be proven innocent. Can you in no way explain who did commit the murder?"

"Was that what brought you here?"

"Frankly, it was."

"Then you have made an error. We do not know of the case at all."

"You came to me when he had been convicted."

"Chance, only. We had lost sight of the boy for some years. We learned of him through his trial, and then we came to you."

"You speak without any feeling. If he is, as you assert, my son and yours, do you realize that you, as a mother, should feel for him?"

"What can I do?" coldly asked Salome. "I am a helpless invalid, unable to go out of this room. Add to that the fact that I know nothing about the crime more than I have read in the papers and you will see I can do nothing. You have power—if you care to save his life, why don't you?"

"Nobody can save it without evidence."

"Seek it, then; it is not my work!"

All the while she had maintained the same cold expression, and it was clear that no motherly feeling moved her in the least. Hallowell sighed. He remembered that when the boy was an infant, the mother had given him no love, but regarded him as an interloper in the family who was no more than a bother and a care to her. It was natural she should feel no more, now.

"Is flesh and blood so weak?" he asked, wearily.

"What can you expect of a woman in my condition?"

"What can one expect of a mother? Her love is that which lives through pain, suffering, disgrace and all time. Have you none of the divine feeling which moves others of your sex?"

Salome looked concerned.

"I have not seen him since he was a child."

"Nor I," replied the judge, "but the tie of blood is strong even in death."

The women exchanged glances. They exulted in the glimpse they had of the strong man's heart. He would be all the easier victim for them.

"Of course," remarked Deborah, with some

haste, "if we had any knowledge which would help him we would be glad to give the information, but I assure you we have none. We do not know who killed Morris Strong. We swear to that."

"We do indeed," added Salome.

The candor in their manner convinced Hallowell. He had come in the hope that they had been holding something back, but the hope died out. He was as far from the truth as ever.

He sat in moody silence while the woman continued to watch him. Bitterly they hated him, and they were glad he suffered. It was much to see the stately oak bend.

At that moment they resembled two vultures watching their prey. Deborah's face was full of exultation; while Salome's marble way relaxed enough to let the gleam of gratified malice shine in her cold eyes. Her face, though, was the same as of old, and the Sphinx could not have been more immovable of feature. She was like a dead woman with eyes still gifted with the power of motion.

Hallowell finally aroused!

"You have never told me how you escaped the flood," he reminded.

"It is easily told. My husband deserted me—"

The judge made a deprecatory gesture, but let the assertion go unchallenged.

"And my life became unbearable. The day of the flood I was some distance from home, spending a few days with friends whom I had gone to see, to relieve the desolation of my existence."

If the truth had been told, in full, it would have been said, then, that Salome had gone to see neighbors as wild and unscrupulous as herself, and that there was no seeking for peace, but for hilarity, in the visit of long ago; but it was not told.

"When the rain subsided I started for home. Filled with the deepest grief"—Hallowell knew this was a falsehood, but he let it go—"I grew desperate on my way. I had the child in my arms, but he was a heavier burden on my soul than to my arms. I think I was temporarily mad, crazed, but this much is certain: unwilling to have him live to know of my wrecked life, I put him on a sort of raft which was floating past, and confided him to the keeping of the river, to live or die as his fate might have been ordained from the beginning."

Again was the truth told only in part. The child's mother had been under the influence of liquor when he was thus left to his fate. That was the plain fact.

Hallowell shivered. To what a low pass had the chosen partner of his life come!

"The raft drifted away, and with it went the child. I tried to go on homeward, but the flood was on and I had to change my route. I was not at any time in danger. When the waters subsided, however, I found that our—that my home was gone, and I was a wanderer on the face of the earth."

"I set out to earn my living, and went some miles away."

"While there I learned of a child which had been saved from the flood, and was in the keeping of a family named Ashton. I went secretly to the place and saw it was my own child."

"I did not make myself known. Why should I? The child was in good hands, and I could not care for him as I would. I let him stay with them. I never have spoken with him since. Three or four times I gained knowledge of him, and when he left his home, after his foster-parents died, I knew of his taking the name of Curtis."

"The next thing I heard of him was when he was on trial, here, for murder. I notified you of his identity, and that's all I know."

"And now the boy is down there!" and the judge pointed toward the tombs.

"He seems to have his mother's fortune and ill luck."

"His mother seems to care nothing about it."

"What do you expect of me?" demanded Salome, with severity. "Am I to add to my misfortunes by grieving over the child of a father who used me so cruelly?"

"We will not discuss that point," responded Hallowell, his patience worn out.

"I am glad to hear you are satisfied to drop it."

Irritably answered the unnatural woman, and the judge was chilled from saying more. He had sent the eminent specialist to see her as he had promised, but he could not inquire as to the result with the present feeling upon him.

He rose to go.

"We shall be glad to see you at any time," sneeringly remarked Salome.

He bent his head in a stately bow.

"Do you intend to remain in New York?" he asked.

"We do!"

The reply was emphatic. His desire to get them away was scented, and the answer did not have to wait. If he had had any plan in his mind it was not unfolded. He moved toward the door, and Deborah prepared to see him out.

"I wish we could help the prisoner, judge," she diplomatically observed.

"Thanks!"

It was his turn to be of few words, and he went down the stairs without the formality of an adieu. He went with a more complete realization of the character of those he left behind him.

CHAPTER XXI.

BRINY BEN.

WHEN the judge emerged from the house, a pair of keen eyes became fixed upon him at once. They were those of Ben Wolf, and Ben's mind was filled with triumph.

"Had a nice long confab, ain't ye?" he muttered. "Wal, I wa'n't in it, but I'm goin' ter be in it now, ef my legs don't fail me. I'll find out who you be, or lose all my wind in racin' after ye."

Fortunately for Ben, Hallowell had not come in a cab on this occasion, and he had no difficult task before him. The judge set off at a good pace, however, walking with the nervous energy of one whose mind is ill at ease.

"Looks like a king o' New Jersey, or some other small umpire," commented jealous Ben. "Ef I had sech a figger I'd hire out inter some Dime Museum, b'gosh!"

His sarcasm did not prevent him from being on the alert, and he followed with due skill.

It was not a short journey, but Judge Hallowell finally drew near his home, and his feet echoed on the flags which were daily trod by men of millions—a very different locality from that Ben was accustomed to. The leader finally paused at a certain door, applied a key and entered.

Briny Ben waited until he felt safe from discovery, and then went forward and read the name on the door-plate.

"Hallowell! Wal, he's got a name ez long ez his pocketbook, an' some couldn't commit it ter memory, but there is reasons why it ain't hard fer me."

He ambled away. He wanted to get more information as to the owner of the house, but he dared not ask of a policeman, and servant maids were not out at the gate at that hour. Luck favored him, however; a man came reeling along the street with the heaviest kind of a liquid load on board, and he made a clutch at Ben's arm.

"I say, friend," he requested, thickly, "can you tell me where Number One-thirty-one is?"

It was but two doors from Hallowell's house, and Ben volunteered to act the guide. He did so, much to the gratitude of the drunken man. Then Ben seized his chance.

"Do you know Hallowell?"

"Do I? Why, like a book."

"Wot's his full name?"

"Judge Hallowell."

"Is his first name 'Judge'?"

"No; it's Otis."

"It's what?"

"Otis."

By this time the drunken man had got the door open, and as he spoke the last words he lost his balance and fell inside the door. A servant appeared to view, and Briny Ben knew his day was over, but if it had been otherwise he would not have found his power of speech at once. He stood staring at the door until the sound of a patrolman's steps awakened him to the instinct of self-preservation, and he moved on, nimble of foot but dazed in mind.

"Otis! he murmured, in a strange way. "Otis—Otis Hallowell! Be I dreamin', or is it ez it seems? Otis Hallowell! Wal, I'll be dashed ter ruin!"

He stopped on a street-corner, took off his hat and waved it in the air wildly.

"Otis, Otis!" he reiterated.

It seemed as if he had caught the drunken mood of his late charge, but it was the drunkenness of triumph. Finally he grew more collected, but broke into chuckles loud and long-continued. It was clear he had made some great and, to him, important discovery.

"No wonder they wa'n't willin' I should share their secret!" he admitted. "Oh! but ain't they had a snap? How long has it been goin' on? Like ez not they've been bleedin' him fer years, an' I never come in. But I'll get my share now; you jest bet I will!"

For one of his surly and slow nature all this exhilaration was remarkable, but Ben really had cause for all his joy. The discovery had put everything on new footing, and, instead of being a beggar for a share of the profits of blackmail, he was where he could act a leading part.

"Oh! but won't I make the women howl!" he elegantly thought. "No more bowin' down at their feet!—no more settin' around like a blind fool while they reap the golden harvest an' give me the husks! Ha! ha!"

He was tempted to go to the "women" at once, but prudence prevailed, and he went home, instead. It was not a night of sound sleep, but when he did rest he dreamed of riches which would have made Midas pale with envy.

When he rose in the morning he had a plan ready for operation, but it did not include an

immediate visit to Deborah and her daughter. Instead, he went back toward Judge Hallowell's and sought for information. He had hardly known whom to apply to, since he could not hope to win the good will of man or woman, but he finally happened upon a grocer's boy and worked the mine to his satisfaction. Answering a question, the boy replied:

"Yes, I do serve Judge Hallowell."

"Do he live alone?"

"Naw; his family is with him."

"Who's he got?"

"Wife and daughter."

"Who?"

"I said wife and daughter."

"Oh! Ah! Yes!"

"Friend o' his?" asked the boy, sarcastically.

"Married, is he? Yes, yes!"

"Say, old chap, what is up? Ef you want to break into the house, don't do it. I'll give you dead away."

Ben had more to ask, but he had lost his grip. He failed to connect with Young America, and the latter soon moved on. Ben had to do the same, but his brow was knit in a frown which was not one of temper, and it was plain he was studying out a problem. He walked without much idea of where he was going, but his feet did their duty, and he finally aroused from thought with a start.

He was before Deborah's house.

He rung the bell with a confident air, and then waited until a servant appeared. She looked at him superciliously. The neighborhood and the house were alike without anything like aristocratic tendencies, but even this maid felt she could look down upon rough Ben Wolf.

The boatman was not in the least abashed. He told whom he wished to see, and she finally decided to give Deborah the chance to do the refusing if there was to be anything of the sort.

Ben had not the least fear that there would be.

There was not. Word came that he would be seen, and he was soon in the room above. Deborah looked both severe and annoyed, but Ben did not care.

"Why are you here?" she demanded.

"Why do you s'pose?"

"You were to keep away—"

"Yes; accordin' ter your plan. Et didn't work, though. You thought you could fool me, an' not let me know where you lived, but you see et wasn't ter be. You've got ter get up early ter beat out Ben Wolf, b'gosh!"

"What do you want?" sourly asked Deborah.

"A talk with you an' her."

He did not know where Deborah's companion was, but he was shrewd enough to suspect that the open door to the next room would solve the question, so he jerked his thumb in that direction.

"She is too nervous to see you."

"Not much, she ain't; I'm here fer business, an' you may ez wal come right ter time. She kin stand it ez wal ez I've stood a good deal o' monkey biz all along. Come ter time; it's the only way!"

Deborah knew Ben of old, and now that his stubborn manner was presented to her so strongly in this case she gave way. She went to Salome, and soon returned to say he could enter the room. He went, and greeted Salome with a short nod. He sat down, and the trio regarded each other. There was hostility in each gaze, and it was plain their alliance in certain ways did not go deeper than the surface.

Suddenly Deborah broke the silence, shortly and sharply.

"I told you it was not safe for you to come here," she exclaimed.

"You said so, then; I know it, now," coolly replied the Water Wolf.

"Then why are you here?"

"Because I'm dead enter you!"

"What do you mean?"

"I know where you got that money!"

"You do?"

"Yes. The judge o' the court panned it out, an' I know why he did it. Lord, Lord! jest ter think that Ota Hallowell is on deck ag'in! Why, it's the richest I ever heerd of!"

Ben broke into chuckles long and loud, while the women exchanged uneasy glances. It was a savage blow to them that he had penetrated their secrets.

"Et's the funniest of all things," Ben went on, his happy mood wonderfully at variance with his usual surly manner. "Why, I ain't heerd of Ota Hallowell in twenty years, afore. I did notice that the judge who set on Curtis's case was named Hallowell, but, Lord! who'd hev thought et was your son-in-law, Deb!"

"How do you know it is?" sharply demanded Deborah.

"I see him here last night; I follered him home; I found out all about him. No wonder you had a way o' gettin' money. Oh! I'm dead enter you, I say, an' now I reckon I shall not be a fifth wheel ter the coach any more."

"Since you know all this you will see the vital need of caution, and the need of lettin' me manage all."

"So I shall, ef the rocks come down. Ef you

are stingy you will see Ben kin do a little bracing, too."

"You would ruin all."
"Mebbel!"

Nothing could change the Wolf's self-confidence, and Deborah and her daughter were almost in despair. They did not give Ben credit for the shrewdness he actually possessed, and believed any effort on his part would, of a verity, be the ruin of everything.

Presently he continued:

"Of all the funny things I ever heard of, this is the queerest. Say, hev you known all along where your dear son-in-law was?"

"Never, until very recently."

"He's an honor ter your family, he is; a big bower an' a red trump. A judge! Lord! pity the rest o' yer flock didn't pan out in that way. Why, you ought ter be a duchess, or temperance orator, or something brilliant. The judge proves that brains run in the Paine family!"

Ben could not get over his exhilaration, but Deborah was in a mood approaching desperation.

"Tell me why you are here!" she demanded.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WILY WOLF'S WEB.

BRINY BEN nodded amiably.

"I'm always glad ter oblige," he professed. "I am here to say that I want more money!"

"But we haven't got it!" Deborah exclaimed, nervously.

"Gammon!"

"I tell the truth. We intend to bleed Otis Hollowell well before we are done with him, but haste would ruin all. We have gone slow, so as to make a sure thing, but it's only a reprieve for him."

"An' a stand-off fer me. Any day you wish you kin skip out an' me be none the wiser. Et won't do; the cloven foot shows, an' I must look out fer Number One. I'll do et, too; I ain't goin' ter let you do me out o' my cash."

He had resumed his old, dogged air, and was a dangerous man to their plans.

"You will ruin all!" Deborah again declared.

"I won't ruin my game."

"You would never succeed with Judge Hollowell."

"I wouldn't go ter him."

The Water Wolf leaned forward and replied in a distinct voice:

"I'd go ter Mrs. Judge Hollowell!"

Ben's eyes lighted up with the genius of his scheme, and he added in a firm voice:

"I'd go ter her an' say: You ain't the legal wife o' Otis Hollowell! There's another woman who claims him, an' you are only an interloper in the fold. That's where I should strike!"

Deborah and Salome looked aghast.

"You would be mad!" Deborah exclaimed.

"Call it as you please."

"The present Mrs. Hollowell must be kept in ignorance, if we are to get anything out of them. It is this which makes the hold upon the judge. If his wife knew of the secret, what cause should we have to ask money of him?"

"He cares ez much fer what the world says as any rich chap does."

"Well, why should his wife pay to keep the record of her disgrace quiet? She would leave Hollowell's roof at once, and that would be the end of it."

"I'll bet my socks she would pay me wal ter know the truth."

Ben was obstinate, but the women both took a hand in the attempt to influence him. Their arguments were logical, and they urged them with the strength of schemers who see their hold slipping away.

Deborah had a hope that Ben was only making his assertion to get more of an ascendancy over them, and she worked to that end, but without making her theory clear to him.

Ben was sullen and firm for awhile, but he yielded in the end.

"All I want is plenty o' cash," he exclaimed, "but I want that soon, an' I want it sure. You kin at any time get a pocketful from Hollowell, and then skip out an' leave me in the lurch. The only way ter deal with me, an' keep me still, is ter get hard money quick, an' hand me over a generous share."

The demand was clear enough, and they met it accordingly. Being in his power they could not promise what he asked, and they promised accordingly. Deborah agreed to go to the judge and make a demand for a large sum, to be delivered at once.

Briny Ben was full of cautions. He did not trust them, and he said so, but added that he should be on the watch all the while, and if they tried to deceive him, or to get out of town with the proceeds of blackmail, he would make them sorry for the treachery.

"I'm goin' ter be on the watch all the while," he asserted. "I'll be lookin' when you don't see me; I'll haunt this section like a ghost; an' nothing will escape my eyes. You'll be mighty smart ter get the bulge on me, an' ef by any chance you should get off, leavin' me in the lurch, I'll follow you ter the ends o' the earth ter be revenged. See?"

"We are not going to deceive you."

"Don't!"

"It is vitally necessary we should all work to one end."

"So it is!" Ben grimly agreed.

"We will not try any unfair game."

"Et wouldn't be safe!"

Nothing could make the Wolf act the man. Perhaps he knew them too well to trust them. Anyhow, he did not trust them.

When he rose to go he turned to Salome. She had scarcely spoken during the interview, but her eyes had been busy. She had lost no part of the conversation, and was as greedy as any of the vultures who were reaching out for Judge Hollowell's money. There was no feeling in Ben's manner, or in his voice, as he brusquely asked:

"How are ye?"

Salome sighed.

"There is no change. What change can I expect but death? Here I sit, day after day, and see no one, and have none of the pleasures of life that others enjoy."

The woman's condition was certainly pitiful, but she referred to it, now, as she did, simply to try and touch Ben's feelings.

"Must be kind o' dreary," he admitted, calmly.

"You cannot understand. Think of being shut out from the world as I am! Think of the living death!"

She lifted her hand; then let it fall heavily. Her living eyes looked out of her dead face with the look which would have moved many. It did not move Ben.

"Wal, I ain't ter blame," he almost rudely replied.

Then he turned away and went to the door. There he paused to again caution then against treachery, and every utterance had a threat as telling as his words could be.

He finally went away, leaving them both relieved and frightened—for they knew how unsafe their scheme was with him to have a share in it. He was satisfied with the call, but still suspicious and surly.

"Ef they try any trick they'll repent it to the day o' their death!" he muttered, as he went down the street.

He lost no time in getting home.

Ben was a man of schemes, himself, and he had another he had not called into play. He found Mary at her work, and he surprised her as she had rarely been surprised before by giving a bluff but amiable greeting in place of his usual surly silence.

"Hullo, gal! how be you?" he asked.

"I am as usual," Mary answered, as soon as she could command speech.

"You look tired."

"Do I?"

"Yes; sorter worn out."

"I am not working any more than usual."

"Wal, don't; you mustn't make yerself sick, ye know."

This solicitude was new in her experience, for the Wolf had never shown her the least kindness, even in her childhood. She did not know what to make of it. He increased her wonder by keeping the mood up, and actually gave his help about the work in various ways. It was not until an hour after that the cloven hoof was revealed. When it was, she experienced no disappointment. She had not been hopeful of a new order of things at that late date.

Finally Ben broke out suddenly:

"How's your Curtis gettin' along?"

Mary started nervously.

"What do you mean?"

"Anything new in his behalf?"

"Nothing, I am sorry to say."

"Too bad! I feel sorry fer him, an' fer you."

Now, I don't believe he is guilty, fer he don't look it; an' it seems a great pity he should suffer fer what somebody else did. It's worried me powerful, but I ain't said nothin' fer fear et would sorter make you feel worse. See things do, of side parties don't keep up out'ard courage, ye see."

Mary did not see. She saw nothing, except that Ben Wolf had developed into a mystery. What it all meant she could not imagine. She did not know how to answer, and did not answer at all.

"I've been thinkin'," pursued Ben, "that ef we had some money we could get the boy out o' his fix. Eh?"

"I think he has all the money he needs."

"Wal, et aint ourn ter use."

"No."

"We want some."

"What could we do?"

"I've got a plan. Can't tell ye w'ot it is, but ef I kin raise the stuff I'm goin' ter clear Curtis."

Mary was not tempted by the alluring bait. She did not understand Ben, but one thing she did believe—he was not sincere.

"Be you willin' ter raise it ef I give ye the chance?" added the Water Wolf.

"How can I?"

Ben moved his chair forward in his eagerness. His whole soul was bound up in his schemes to get money, and he was on nettles to spring the newest plot.

"I want ye ter go ter Judge Hollowell an' ask him ter advance the cash!"

Mary's face flushed. At first she thought only of her own visit to the judge, and thought that Ben might have learned of it, but she soon gave up the idea. The apparent wildness of the plan next caught her attention.

"You remember who he is," Ben pursued; "he's the man who set on the bench when Curtis was tried. Now they say he is always ready ter do a good turn ter the poor an' needy, an' ef you go an' say we want the money bad, he is sure ter hand it over an' make no talk about it. See?"

Mary found it hard to reply. She was bewildered by the proposition, knowing it could not be other than a selfish aim of the boatman's, but she could not find words to meet him.

"It's mighty easy," Ben insisted.

"I do not think so."

"Why?"

"The judge would refuse."

"I'll bet he wouldn't."

"Why should he comply?"

"Wal, it's like this: You would tell him how much we need it—telling him, o' course, that you an' Curtis are goin' ter be married as soon as you kin; an' you would dwell on your lover Curtis, an' sorter move the judge's heart. See?"

The first surprise was over, and Mary thought she did understand. Not being aware of anything more than the boatman's craving for money it looked like a scheme to get that money, and no more. Her nature revolted against the plan, and she finally gained her old composure and firmly answered:

"I am sure Homer has all the money he needs, and I cannot bring myself to do the thing you ask. There is no reason why Judge Hollowell should give to us, even if he is generous, as you say, and I cannot ask him—"

"I tell ye I know he won't refuse."

"I cannot ask him!"

"Do ye mean ye won't?"

"I did not say that."

"Now, gal, see here: This is all easy, an' nobody will know it but us two. You jest go along an' mind me. I'm yer best friend, an' I'm older an' wiser than you be. Oblige your father in this—"

"Again I say I cannot."

There was unexpected firmness in her manner of speech, and the Water Wolf's temper flashed up.

"An' I say, by thunder! that you will an' shall!" he cried, hotly.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MONEY IS CALLED FOR.

BRINY BEN pounded his knee as if registering an oath, and his red face grew redder with excitement. His mask of good-will dropped, and he was the turbulent Ben of old.

Mary had seen too much of him to be frightened by his outbreaks, unless they went beyond words, but her mystification was deep and increasing.

"You must go ter Judge Hollowell!" he repeated, after a pause, as she did not reply.

"Father, you cannot accuse me of being neglectful of your commands," Mary answered, at last, "but you ask too much now. I fail to see why I should go to Judge Hollowell, of all men—"

"Because I tell you to."

"What interest can he have in Homer Curtis?"

"Not any!" declared Ben, hastily. "I didn't say he had. All I did say was that he was generous—"

"This grows tiresome to me. I have said that Homer has all the money that is needed, and he has able counsel to see to his interests. We should work in vain, even if we had the means of doing it. I feel, too, that we should be likely to do more harm than good. Do not urge me, for I cannot agree to your proposal."

It was her ultimatum, but Ben did not recognize it as such until he had wasted a good deal of argument and many a harsh word. He tried all means, but in the end he admitted defeat and let it rest.

After that he sat around and sulked like a wounded animal. He would not answer Mary, but kept his place and scowled his wrath. He did some thinking, too, and the result was seen later in the day. He went out just before nightfall and purchased a new coat. It was as rough as its new owner, and did not fit well, but he was not aware of it, and he thought he had made himself presentable to any society.

He did not take the garment home, but housed it in a safe place.

Next he went home and had supper, eating in silence and still scowling blackly.

Mary was worried. She knew him well enough to be aware there was some scheme in his mind, and she always feared when there was evidence that he had a scheme. Such things never meant any good with him.

After eight o'clock he went out, secured the coat, and, putting it on with satisfaction, started on a pilgrimage. He had trod the way before and did not hesitate, and in due time he approached the house where Judge Hollowell lived.

He rung the bell and a servant appeared.

"Tell the judge a gent wants ter see him!" So commanded the boatman, his manner lordly in one way if not in another, but the servant looked in wonder.

"What name?" he doubtfully asked.

"I'll tell that to him."

"Your card—"

"I don't deal with sech rubbish, an' I ain't here ter deal with you, either. Ef I was, I'd know how ter do it, mightv quick. Did you hear my say-so? Get a move on, an' go ter Hallowell, quick. See?"

He was not improving his chance, and the result might have been a fight at the door, but the judge happened to come along, himself, and undertook to solve the difficulty. Ben became civil, for he had an end to gain, and asked for a word in private with the master of the house.

There was a time when he might not have secured it, but now the judge was patient with every one, and he led the way to the parlor. Ben sat down with all the confidence in the world. He was confident. He did not intend to interfere with Deborah's campaign, but he knew he had the means of making a sensation if he saw fit, and it gave him an air of confidence not appropriate to a supplicant.

He assumed a confidential air.

"Judge," he said, "I've come in regard ter Homer Curtis!"

It was an ominous opening, and he watched to see the result.

He met with disappointment.

Of late the judge had been looking for an attack from any quarter, and caution had restored his old calmness to its proper place. He heard, now, and believed an attack was coming, but he did not waver or betray signs of confusion, or in any way show understanding of what was said.

"Proceed!" he requested, affably.

"About Homer Curtis, ye know," Ben repeated.

"I caught what you said. Who is Homer Curtis, pray?"

Ben was disappointed. He wanted to see signs of guilty knowledge, but there was none. This did not alter the fact that Hallowell knew all, but as Ben wanted to make an underhand impression it was not pleasing.

"You sentenced him to death, ye know," he growled.

"I remember now."

"I thought ye would."

Again Ben missed the mark, and he began to feel discouraged.

"This Curtis is a fine feller," he declared, "an' he ain't guilty. We all know it, an' ef we had the money we could prove it. By 'we' I mean my daughter an' me. She it engaged ter him; my daughter is, ye see."

"Indeed! Who is your daughter?"

"Her name is Mary Wolf, Mine is Ben Wolf, waterman. See? Now, judge, ter be frank, we want ter prove him innocent, but we ain't got the money fer the campaign."

The speaker had assumed a confidential air. He leaned forward in his chair, and tried to look amiable and good. It was a herculean task, and not wholly successful.

Hallowell was puzzled. He had not forgotten Mary; he remembered her with the deepest of good will; but he could not understand this man's visit. If Mary wanted money, why did she not come herself? She ought to be sure of a friendly welcome, while this disreputable stranger could hardly expect it. Again, Hallowell regarded it as absurd that the visitor could be Mary's father. Ben, blissfully ignorant of the fact that Mary had been there before him, watched anxiously to see how his plan was to succeed.

Quietly the judge answered:

"Curtis has a lawyer, has he not?"

"Yes."

"Isn't he capable of managing the case?"

"We want ter work a side issue—"

"Don't the lawyer believe in it?"

"I ain't seen him."

"Do so, at once. That is my advice."

"But we need money, an' my gal thought you might supply it. She's bashful; the gal is, an' she allowed she'd never dare ter face ye, so I come instead."

The Wolf was fast proving himself a falsifier, but, though Hallowell saw that much, he did not betray the fact.

"Why should you expect me to give you anything?"

"They tell me you are generous."

"You must have confounded me with some of my neighbors: I am not aware that I possess any such quality of mind."

Briny Ben moved uneasily. He seemed doomed to misfortune in his efforts, and the many schemes for getting money which was not his did not look half so promising as they did.

"You ought ter hear my poor gal moan an' take on!" he declared, with pathos. "She's jest fadin' all away, she is."

"Why not bring her here?"

"She says she dassent come."

"Have I ever seen her?"

"No. Wal, mebbe she was at Curtis's trial, but you wouldn't be likely ter notice her."

"And she dares not come here?"

"No."

"Not even with her father?"

"No; she's timid, ye sees."

Hallowell saw a good deal more than his visitor thought he did, and knew the latter was acting a false part.

"Well, Mr. Wolf, if you will bring Curtis's lawyer with you I will talk business, but I cannot do it otherwise. I am not generous, as you have mistakenly been led to believe, and I can't do what you ask. Let the lawyer come, however, and we will see what can be done if he says there is not money enough for the campaign."

Ben's face was a study. He was mad clean through at his failure, and in the heat of his passion he came near ruining all by letting out the real secret and informing Hallowell that he knew of his past life, and about the prisoner of the Tombs.

Restraining himself, he made an addition to his plea in the same vein, but only with the same result. He did not move the judge in the least, and it finally dawned upon him that all effort was fruitless, and that he might as well go home as to sit there and waste words.

He rose with his sullen air at its height.

"Et shall be ez you say," he admitted, "but I hope you won't be sorry fer it."

"Why should I?"

"When I think o' my sufferin' gal—"

"Try to curb your feelings. Of course a parent has such weaknesses, but, after all, what is a human heart? There are thousands of them within a few blocks of us. One is small in the grand total."

Briny Ben suspected he was being mocked at, and the secret again trembled on his lips, but he checked his rash desire and took the advice with sullen composure.

He went out of the house, escorted to the door by the judge. Once on the street his anger found vent, and his muttered remarks referred less to a suffering daughter than to rage and disappointment.

"He shall smart fer this!—he shall!" the Water Wolf cried. "I ain't the man ter be trod under foot, by mighty! an' I'll be revenged. Sneers at me, does he? Don't know I kin crush him like I would a mean snake, does he? Oh! it ain't wise fer them ter throw stones an' mud who live in glass houses. Yes, yes; I'll make him sweat!"

All the way home Ben indulged in thoughts like these, and when he reached there he was so far forgetful of his "suffering daughter" that he did not even speak to her.

Mary was equally mute, but more observing. She knew from his manner that whatever scheme he had gone out to try had been a failure. He betrayed the fact in various ways, and she knew his moods well.

For this reason she knew he was now meditating some new plan.

It was one which included both revenge on Hallowell and the lining of his pockets. Since the last interview he had been more than ever anxious to give the judge a taste of his powers of mischief, and as there was but one way, he looked to it carefully.

He realized that Deborah had spoken well when she said it did not look promising to get as much money out of Mrs. Mirabel Hallowell as could be had from the judge, but he would not give up the idea.

"I kin bleed her more or less," he thought, "an' ef Deb kin reap a harvest off from Otis, I'll then step in an' give the whole snap away ter his present wife; but tell her I will ef I lose money out o' it. I'm bound ter do that. Yes, yes; I'll tell the judge's wife ef I sink the whole ship in doin' it!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DISSATISFIED SPY.

THE following day Edward Acton called upon Chief Claxton.

"I want to be released from my promise!" he declared.

The detective heard without change of countenance.

"What promise?" he asked.

"To act the spy!"

"You refer to—"

"My position at Judge Hallowell's."

"Ah! don't you like it?"

"I have before told you it is in every way repugnant to my feelings, and contrary to the way of a gentleman. I am in Hallowell's house as a living lie and as a spy. It is too much."

Dryly the detective asked:

"How is Miss Hallowell?"

Acton flushed.

"You are not perspicacious, now. I have not concealed my opinion of any member of the household. I admit all seem to me the acme of refinement and noble bent of life. For this reason I must ask to be released from my position."

"Homer Curtis would like to be released from his!"

Claxton had leaned back in his chair, and his leg dangled over the arm thereof in the most negligent fashion imaginable. He looked to be the personification of ease and indifference, but he still had the faculty of sending shots home.

"I know; I know," Acton admitted; "but how am I helping my unfortunate friend?"

"By doing as I have told you!"

"What have I discovered?"

"Anything new?"

"No."

"Then your discoveries would not sink the ships in the river, it is true, but I live in hope."

"And I in fear! Why should I spy upon Otis Hallowell? What good can it do Curtis? Heaven knows I would do all in my power for my poor friend, but how am I to further his ends by acting the spy?"

"The trouble with you, Mr. Acton, is that you are afraid you will help him!" coolly replied Claxton.

"Sir!"

"You are afraid you will discover something which will help him!" steadily repeated the detective. "You know I would not have put you in that house without good reason."

"You put me there blindfold; I have never had the least idea of what I was to discover, or look for."

"If my life had depended upon it, I could not have told you. I did not know, myself."

"Then why put me there?"

"To save Homer Curtis," evenly replied Claxton, "but I see I have mistaken both my agent and the depth of your friendship for Curtis."

Acton flushed. He struggled with himself for a moment and then earnestly exclaimed:

"Can you pardon me? I am a fool, and I see it clearly. I should never have forgotten Curtis's interests, and I will not again. Overlook my folly if you can!"

"Once more you are sensible. I hope it will last."

"Believe me, it will; but I am placed in a very painful position at Hallowell's. Going there with a lie on my lips, and in my heart, I have been used as if I were the most honorable of men, and I hate myself for the deception."

"I am sorry, but I ask you to stay a little longer. I think it will soon be over."

"It shall be as you say. If you know of any way to hasten events I shall be glad to have you, however. The kindness of the family is a constant reproach to my guilty mind, and I would be out of it as soon as possible. Rely upon me, though, to give my best services to the cause we have in mind."

"Do it, and don't be wholly disheartened. It does not follow that all is lost."

"Can you see hope?" Acton eagerly asked.

"I can't say I do."

Edward's face grew grave; he believed hope was not a figure in the case.

"You tell me there is nothing new?" Claxton questioned.

"I know of nothing."

"Watch on! Something may occur which is not expected. Watch on; watch unceasingly."

It was a vague injunction, but Acton was always oppressed by the detective's charges, and he felt in the old mood, now. He had set Claxton down as a man all cunning and no feeling. He did not credit the claim that he was working in the dark except as far as he was himself concerned, and believed it was cunning, pure and simple, which was keeping him in such ignorance.

As he walked toward Hallowell's, later on, he thought of all this.

"I would not endure it for any one but Homer. This man Claxton seeks to play with me as a chessman does with his pieces; he moves me on the board, and I go about blindly and mysteriously, exposed to attack I cannot myself meet. And in the end—what then? Claxton will win or lose, as the case may be, but I shall surely lose. Yes, lose all!—lose Alice's regard—lose her friendship—and win only her hatred!"

It was not in the best of humor that he reached the house. He felt like going to the room allotted to him and spending the day in brooding over the matter, but Miss Hallowell met him in the hall by chance, and he went with her to the parlor, instead.

"I am again down-hearted, Mr. Vinton," she declared, with a sigh, addressing him by the name he bore in the Hallowell household. "Do you know, I think I am getting to be a perfect image of discouragement!"

"And all since I came to the house!"

"You have not forgotten my unlucky speech, I see. You must forget; don't make me answerable for an unfortunate combination of ideas. Of course you have nothing to do with it, and I assure you that you have the good will and confidence of all here."

"That is pleasant," declared Acton, but in his heart he wished it otherwise.

"What do you suppose is troubling me now?"

"I should be glad to know. Perhaps I can help you."

"There may be such a thing as being too sympathetic. But you shall hear. As you are aware, my father is a judge. I have never given much thought to the matter. Women are not supposed to be interested in business, and I am sure I could not be so to a practical extent if I tried ever so hard. Thus, I have looked upon

my father's calling with as much indifference as if he were a merchant or something of that sort. Now, I realize that it is different."

Edward began to be worried.

"Why so?"

"A story I have heard. It was from an old gentleman, retired from business, who lives near us—an old family friend. He was present in court during a recent trial where my father was the presiding judge. He took the interest in the matter which an idle man will, and told me of it to amuse me. Ugh! he simply chilled me, and left me gloomy and melancholy."

"What was the case?"

"A trial for murder, in which the accused was adjudged guilty, and is even now under sentence of death. I don't know whether he is guilty or not, but this much is sure—I am greatly interested in one who is interested in him. He has a lady who thinks much of him; who is probably his affianced. Think of that!—think of their relations, and of her feelings now he is condemned to die!"

Alice showed deep feeling, herself, and Edward was very uneasy.

"She is a poor girl, as far as worldly goods go," Alice pursued, "but she is a woman, nevertheless. Think of her now!"

"It is hard," Acton admitted.

"Her name," continued Alice, mechanically, "is Mary Wolf!"

Acton had been sure of it. He had no reason for so thinking, but had from the first had the firm belief that it would result so.

"She is the daughter of a longshoreman. Very poor they are, no doubt, but my neighbor tells me she has an excellent face, and is no doubt an excellent girl. You don't know how I feel for her!"

"Better keep your mind from the subject," hastily advised Acton.

"Why?"

"You can do her no good, and—"

"I am not so sure of that. I am going to see her, and I want you to accompany me!"

Alice had come out of her usual retiring mood, and spoke with the decision of one whose sympathies are strongly awakened. Since she heard of Mary Wolf it had occurred to her that she had not been doing the amount of good in the world that she might have done, and now she was eager to make amends for what she thought was a wasted past.

Acton was speechless for a moment. The idea of his going with her to Mary was startling.

"Don't think of such a thing!" he finally exclaimed, hastily.

"Why not?"

"Would you go where poverty rules and squalor is king—"

"Where else can one do as much good?"

"But their home would be so different from your—"

"Then I may be able to lighten their burden. I imagine this unknown Mary has a poor old mother and father who feels deeply for her in her distress, and that it is a sad home, now."

Edward thought of Ben Wolf and shivered. He was not the kind of parent pictured.

"Miss Hollowell," he replied, "I should be very glad to help you, but in this you are wrong, if I may say so. Abandon your idea, for it is not wise. Leave these poor people to others; it is best so."

Alice was quick to accept a rebuff, usually, and she then and there abandoned the notion of having Acton for her escort, but the plan of going, herself, was given new life and zeal by the opposition.

Her native tact now came into play, and though she talked more about Mary Wolf she did not give Edward cause to suppose his advice had fallen on stony soil. He was in fear lest it might be so, however, and took occasion to advise against it in a delicate but plain way.

Advice is easy to give, and is one of the things which are seldom acceptable and as seldom followed.

Alice heard all and did not give reason for him to believe he was talking in vain, but the result was not in keeping with what he wished.

When they separated he remembered the circumstance with uneasiness.

"What evil genius has put the notion into her head? I don't know that any harm would ensue if she went to Mary Wolf, but I am sure Claxton would not approve of it, and there's no knowing what the result would be. I hope she won't think of it again."

His wish came too late.

At that very moment Alice was preparing for the street, and with a fixed purpose in view.

"I'll go and see her immediately!"

Such had been Miss Hollowell's decision when alone, and she made preparations accordingly.

She left the house without being observed by any one, and took her way toward the Wolf residence, she having learned where it was from the gentleman who had told her of the trial.

In due time she reached the vicinity of the house. Never before had her dainty feet trod such a street. Sympathetic as she was, she had never thought of going among the poor.

Now, she was where both poverty and vice had their rule and ruin.

CHAPTER XXV.

BROTHER AND SISTER MEET.

ALICE looked in wonder at the scene presented by the untidy, rough street, and the presence of certain rough and untidy young men on the corners, who looked at her offensively, brought the blood to her cheeks and made her quicken her steps. She felt the need of an escort, and was glad when the number of the desired house came to her sight.

She rung the bell. The slipshod woman who answered the summons gazed at her in wonder, but, on hearing her request, muttered:

"Next floor, front!"

Alice went up. The further evidences of poverty were all around, and her brief hesitation was forgotten in her desire to meet the girl whose trouble had brought her there.

She knocked at one of the doors.

It was soon opened, and she saw a pretty, but sad-faced young woman whose every look was a recommendation in Alice's view.

"I wanted to see Miss Mary Wolf," she explained.

"That is my name," was the gentle reply.

"Then it is you I wish to see."

Mary was surprised, for she was not accustomed to receive such callers, but she did not forget hospitality. She invited Alice in, and gave her a chair. The daughter of the judge looked around with curiosity for a moment, but speedily transferred all her attention to Mary. She sought with careful attention to read the other's face.

No hard task was hers; Mary had a charm about her which was not to be misunderstood, and Alice felt happy, then, that she had come. Surely the child of poverty was all she could expect in appearance.

"I hope," Alice began, "you are not inclined to resent the coming of a stranger, for I am not sure my errand is one which will seem to you as it is intended."

"I can tell better as to that when I have learned of its nature, but I am sure that I shall not resent it."

"My expression was not happy, I confess. Let me not try to deal any more in generalities, but come to the point. I think you are the same Mary Wolf who was in court during the recent trial of Homer Curtis?"

"I am the same Mary Wolf," was the reply, accompanied by a sigh.

"I hope you will pardon me for coming here, since I have no idle motive in doing so. I was not at the trial, and never knew of you until recently told of the case by one who was present. My sympathies were aroused, and I could not avoid coming to your home to ask if I could help you in any way whatever."

"You are very kind, and I should be ungrateful not to appreciate it."

"Now I am here I confess I do not know what to say or do, but this much is certain—I feel for a sister woman in trouble. More practically, if I can do anything for you I shall be glad to."

"Unfortunately, I know of nothing," Mary sighed.

"This is a severe trial for you."

"It is worse than death!" was the sudden, bitter exclamation.

"Is the proof positive against him?"

"Proof! There was none; he was convicted on a false accumulation of evidence—of unfortunate, misleading circumstances."

"Was the judge to blame?" Alice asked, anxiously.

"Oh! no!"

"Could he help you, now?"

"No."

"You—you are a more than passing friend of this young man?" hesitatingly asked the visitor.

"He is more than life to me. I was to be his wife!"

The pathos of the reply went home to Alice's heart. Deeper than words was the sound of the girl's voice.

"Could not his lawyers save him?"

"It was tried in vain."

"But some hope may remain."

"I have lost hope."

"That you must not do. There is always hope."

Alice felt how useless such words were in reality, but they served a better purpose than she dared to expect. Ever since her trouble Mary had been bearing the load alone, hoping against hope, and seeing less of it left as each day went on. And all the while she had had no other person of her own sex in whom to confide. The human heart in its hour of affliction turns naturally to some sympathizing friend. He whose nature is such that he refuses the call of Nature and goes to no one, then, has a heavy burden; but if it can be told in the presence of sympathy, the load lessens with the tears which wash its bitterness away.

Stranger that Alice was, Mary found herself accepting the kindness offered, and with a relief not to be expected.

The conversation continued for some time, and though it might have been unimportant to any one else, it did not impress them as coming under that head. Steadily the bond of sympathy was cemented, and Alice learned, little by

little, much of the case which, before then, Mary had not dreamed of telling to any of her friends.

The visitor was all in earnest and she had many things to suggest. They were often very impracticable, and always more sympathetic than hopeful; but their import could not be misunderstood.

"I am afraid I can do nothing," finally confessed Alice, "but I have a plan which may be of promise. I will see if it is so, and if anything comes of it, you shall know."

Her plan was to ask her father for his aid, but she was careful enough not to mention it prematurely. Thus far, too, she had overlooked giving her own name, and Mary was ignorant of her identity.

"One thing more," she went on. "I wish to see Mr. Curtis. Can it be done?"

"I am not sure, but I think it can. I am allowed to enter his cell, after the keepers have made sure I have nothing with me which could be used by him to effect his escape; and I do not see why you should not fare equally well."

"When can we go?"

"I was going to-day, for Homer's lawyer has secured permission."

"Then let us go at once. But I forgot; you may think I would spoil the interview."

"On the contrary, I shall be glad to have you keep me company."

There was sincerity in the reply, and it was so decided. Mary made her preparations. It was at this juncture that Alice had a sudden thought.

"I have not given you my name!" she muttered. "How stupid of me. I am Alice Hollowell, and the daughter of Judge Hollowell. You may remember him in connection with the trial."

Remember him! Mary had the best of reason to remember, but not so much because he had sat on the bench as on account of later developments. She knew Edward Acton had gone to the house on some mysterious errand. Now, she was startled to find that the judge's daughter was in her own home.

She had been looking the opposite way when the announcement was made, and she managed to control herself before she looked around. She did not, however, feel the liking for her guest that had been hers just before.

Without knowing why she felt a thrill of suspicion.

"I wonder that you came to me," she observed.

"I have told you why. Is the reason less forcible because I am who I am?"

The solicitude in the question did much to disarm Mary, and she hastened to avow her innocence of all prejudice.

There was now food for thought where there had been none previously, and she studied Alice closely, but the latter was one to bear the strictest scrutiny. Her face spoke for itself, and Mary decided whatever any one else might be, her visitor was free from all suspicion.

They journeyed to the Tombs in company.

When they arrived Lawyer Pollard was just finishing an interview with his client, and he took charge of matters and helped the latest callers over all rough places. They entered the cell of the condemned man.

Homer had been warned that he was to have a stranger visitor, but he did not know who it was, and when he rose to meet them there was even more ignorance on his part than on that of Miss Hollowell.

Neither had the least suspicion that they who had a common father were anything to each other; neither imagined that, though they now met for the first time, they should long have known each other; and as they looked with mutual curiosity it would have been thought a madman who might have told them they were brother and sister.

The introduction gave Curtis his first surprise. The name, Hollowell, had come to be of more than passing interest in his life, and it assumed new importance, now.

It was mysterious that the judge should come to him and talk as he did, pledging him to secrecy, and now what meant the coming of the judge's daughter?

He greeted her with faultless politeness, and Mary soon made all known. Alice was there as a sympathetic friend, and no more.

Curtis did not question the statement, but he was not so sure it was true. A wave of suspicion passed over him. Could it be that Hollowell was less of a friend than he had assumed to be, and that the girl was now there as a spy?

The suspicion was natural, but before Alice went her manner had about eradicated the doubt, and he was willing to believe her all she claimed to be—one moved only by sympathy.

He fully realized, however, that it was an odd chance which had brought her there after her father's visit.

She talked with growing interest, for she had taken the deepest liking for Mary, and now found Curtis all that any one could ask for, in appearance, and the best of good-will prevailed. There was, however, nothing to tell of the bond between two of them; nothing to tell that the tie of blood was there—no secret magnetism such as has been claimed in similar cases.

Before she rose to go Alice mentioned an idea which had been growing in her mind.

"I am going to interest my father in this case!" she declared. "He has great influence, and I will ask him to do all he can for you. I am too much ignorant of the ways of law and other things to know what he can do, but he is of a kind heart, and he will not turn a deaf ear to my request. If he can help you he will."

Curtis murmured his thanks. He wondered what the judge would say when he knew his daughter had been in the cell of a condemned man without his permission.

He feared it would be an injury to his chances, but there was no help for it. It would seem singular, and doubtless be wholly useless, to ask her to say nothing. No; the best way was to accept the drifting of Fate's ship, and see what the result would be. Probably nothing would come of it.

The girls went away with good wishes on their lips. They, too, parted outside.

"You shall hear from me again," Alice promised.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FOR THE DOOMED MAN'S SAKE

ON one of the leading streets of the Metropolis was the residence of a judge well known to all who kept any track of the men and deeds of the City of New York. He had an advanced and eminent position in his profession, and had sat as a justice until his hair was gray with the passage of years.

At the same hour when Alice Hallowell and Mary Wolf were in the cell at the Tombs a card was brought to this eminent judge as he sat in his parlor. He read and directed:

"Show the gentleman in, at once!"

A tall and imposing-looking man entered. It was Judge Hallowell. The senior magistrate rose and hastened to grasp his hand.

"My dear judge!" he exclaimed, "I am very glad to see you. Pray be seated, and let us smoke the pipe of peace in the old way!"

For years Hallowell had been welcome to the home of the speaker, and though their friendship was, in one sense, founded wholly on their association in their profession, they had taken delight in doing favors for each other, and in extending the courtesies of home and fireside.

Now they sat down as of old and began to talk accordingly. But Otis Hallowell's mind was not on his work, and he came around to more important matters as soon as he could.

"Judge," he said, "I believe you now have before you the case, on appeal, of one Homer Curtis, who is condemned to die for murder?"

"Such is the fact."

"It is one of my cases."

"I remember the fact."

"When do you render your decision on the appeal?"

"Very soon. The decision is all settled now, but I have held it back as a matter of custom."

"May I ask the result?"

"Can you doubt? Your rulings will all be sustained."

Hallowell's face fell. He had expected and dreaded this reply, but had never given up the hope that it would be different.

"Indeed!" he murmured.

"It cannot be otherwise. There is no new evidence, nor claim of any; and as for the few objections to your decisions, they are puerile. I am surprised that Curtis's lawyer should have come before us with such a weak plea for a new trial."

"My rulings are not immaculate."

"They are, if I may say so without seeming to flatter, the nearest so of those of any judge of whom I know. In this case they could not be faulted."

"But there must be some weak point in the prosecution's case?"

"There is none. All is clear as a bell, so to speak."

"But do you think the verdict in accordance with the facts as presented?"

"Beyond doubt."

Otis Hallowell was growing desperate.

"He was not seen to do the murder."

"As long as circumstantial evidence prevails in our courts of justice we cannot find a weakness in such evidence as we have here. Be at ease, Hallowell; your reputation for fair rulings will not suffer in the case of *The People versus Homer Curtis*!"

The senior judge looked up with a beaming smile, as if he was giving an assurance which would bring unalloyed pleasure. Little did he imagine what it did bring to his companion. If Hallowell had been on trial for murder, himself, he would not have been so much moved as he was then. More than his own ruin seemed before him.

Leaning forward in his chair he exclaimed in an intense voice:

"Judge, I want you to decide against me!"

"Eh?"

"Curtis must have a new trial!"

"What, what?" cried the senior judge, amazed.

"I wish you to decide that my rulings were wrong, and prejudicial to the cause of the prisoner!"

"You do?"

"I do, sir."

"Upon—my—word!"

The speaker could find no terms in which to express himself with sufficient force, but the way which he uttered the few simple words told of unbounded astonishment.

"Why, you must be deranged!" he exclaimed, after a pause. "I never heard of such a thing. A judge who wants his rulings faulted! Well, well, we shall hear of an honest politician next!"

"I want you to do this as a favor to me, judge."

"A favor! Well, well! And why?"

"Because I am convinced that the prisoner is innocent."

"What is your proof?"

"I confess I can give none, but I desire the consummation I have mentioned. I am dissatisfied with the result of the trial, and would gladly see the young man have another chance for his life. If we take it from him we take what we cannot restore, and all on the basis of circumstantial evidence. I have given the matter due thought, and am convinced that justice will miscarry if this thing goes on. Let us not have the possibility of an error to worry us when we are old, and done with bench and bar. Give him a chance for his life!"

The senior judge sat motionless.

"You amaze me!" he confessed.

"Because I ask for justice tempered with mercy?"

"Because you want your case torn up."

"My rulings—"

"Were perfect!"

"The evidence—"

"Was strong."

"But the jury may have decided hastily."

"Then it fails to show. How could they decide otherwise with such evidence before them?"

"Be that as it may, I still desire you to hand down a decision which will grant a new trial. Don't send a man out of the world so hastily who may be—who must be innocent!"

"But you say you have no evidence to that effect."

"I have none—"

"A judge should be able to give a logical reason for his acts and opinions."

"I cannot give such reasons, sir, but if you will take the will for the deed I will say that I have the strongest of reasons, in private. Oblige me by doing as I say, and any favor I can do now, or henceforth, for you will be done gladly."

"But upon what grounds can I grant a new trial? As I have said, neither the evidence nor your rulings have a flaw, as far as I can see, and the lawyer for the young man presents nothing to enable me to have a doubt. You will admit it is a serious matter to ignore law and evidence. The State would be put to fresh expense, and my act would be subject to the criticisms of those who would delight in accusing me of worse than error."

Hallowell was silent; he knew it to be as stated.

"You see how I am placed," added the senior judge.

"This matter is of vital interest to me, sir."

"Did you know this young man?"

"I—I know of him."

"Has he worthy parents?" was the sympathetic inquiry.

Hallowell brushed his hand nervously over his face.

"I think his father stands well in the eyes of the public."

"What did he do at the trial?"

"The father?"

"Yes."

"I—I think he acted as well for the boy as he could under the circumstances."

"You say he is an honorable man?"

"I think he is so reputed."

"Did he give the son the benefit of careful rearing?"

"As far as ability went."

"Then it is a sad case. I am very sorry, Hallowell, that I can see no loophole for a favorable decision on my part. The fact is, judge, you did your work too well."

This was intended as much for a compliment as anything else, but never did compliment fall more to the ground. Well, indeed, did Otis Hallowell know he had "done his work too well!" And little did the senior judge suspect how his learned brother was writhing in anguish of spirit over the hopelessness of the case. Hallowell had been aware when he came that the chances were all against him, so far as law and evidence were concerned, but he had been full of hope, if not belief, that he would succeed in over-influencing the arbiter of Curtis's fate.

Once there his eloquence seemed all to have deserted him, and no wonder. He had no case, and, to a cool sifter of law, impassioned appeal counts for but little unless supported by law and evidence.

Not yet did he abandon the attempt, however, and the interview was prolonged for some time.

"I can promise you but one thing," finally

stated the senior judge. "I will again go over the matter with care, and I'll give the accused the benefit of every doubt."

"One thing more! Do not send in your decision until you hear from me again."

"I gladly promise that, and I am sorry I cannot do more."

There the affair practically rested, and all further talk was of subordinate nature. Hallowell did not pursue it to an extreme, for he was anxious to get away, and this he did soon after. He went toward home.

The result of the interview had not surprised him, but it was, nevertheless, a disappointment. The word expressed it but feebly. With the adverse decision of the judge he saw all the dangers of the position even more clearly.

Homer Curtis seemed doomed to the gallows.

Every day had made the hold of the unfortunate young man stronger upon Otis Hallowell. Truly, the tie of blood was all powerful, and though they had been so long apart the father was as deeply interested as if he had known of the tie long before.

Now, the probability of the young life going out in sorrow and shame was overwhelming.

Once at his own house Hallowell hurried to his room, anxious to be alone, but he had hardly closed the door when Alice's voice was heard asking if she could come in. He wanted to say No, but there was a plaintiveness in her tone which made him hesitate and then answer affirmatively.

She entered and came to his side at once. With unusual impulsiveness for her she exclaimed:

"I want to ask a favor of you!"

"Proceed, child."

"Will you grant it?"

"Come, come! that is not fair! What is the favor?"

"I want you to save a human life!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

DEBORAH'S CALL

JUDGE HALLOWELL could not avoid a start. The statement seemed so ill-timed, and yet so well-timed, as it were, that he could not keep his usual composure.

"Don't let me frighten you," Alice pursued. "When I say I want you to save a human life, it does not mean that one of your kin or friends is in such need—far from it."

"Then who is?"

"One in whom I have become interested through the force of circumstances, and whom I would be glad to help not only for his own sake, but for the sake of another."

"You mystify me. Come to the point, child," the judge urged.

"The person in peril is a prisoner in the Tombs."

"In the Tombs?"

Hallowell echoed the words with emotion. Alice could not fail to notice, but she did not understand the cause thereof.

"Be patient," she requested. "I suppose I am stupid in the light of your legal knowledge and wiser years, but give me time. There is in the Tombs a young man in peril of his life. Of course you cannot sympathize with him now, for he is nothing to you; but he is much to some one else—to a girl who loves him tenderly. For her sake you will listen, will you not?"

Hallowell's face was turned away.

"Who is this young man?" he asked.

"His name is Homer Curtis!"

The judge had been sure of it. Fate was playing with him like a veritable football, and he was surprised only in an indefinite way. Anything was possible, now. But he felt the force of an appeal coming as this came.

"What do you know of him?" he asked, as soon as he could command his voice.

"I have been there."

"Where?"

"In the Tombs."

"In the Tombs?"

Hallowell gasped the words, rather than spoke them. His daughter in the Tombs! It was like a blow to him.

"Don't be angry," she implored. "I went under the impulse of the moment, and never thought what you might think of it. I am sorry if you are vexed, but it is true, nevertheless."

"Why did you go—how did you go?"

"I went with Mary Wolf, the affianced of the unfortunate prisoner."

"And what do you know of her?"

"I went to her home to see about her, and our visit to the prison was made suddenly. Don't blame me, for I feel sure this young man is not so bad as they say. He looks good and manly, and he can't be a murderer—no; he cannot!"

The judge gazed and said nothing. This was progress with a vengeance. He would be prepared for anything, now, since Alice had been there! But he began to wonder how she gained any inkling to the matter. Had some of his foes struck him in the dark?

"You saw him at the trial," Alice pursued, "and I am sure you will not say he is an evil-looking man. I do not think him so, and I must say I am as much interested in his case as if he

was an old friend of mine. Of course I do not mean by that that I am interested except for Mary Wolf's sake, for he is nothing to me."

Nothing to her! The judge wondered at the choice she made of words. Nothing to her! It was true; he was nothing but her brother! Fate grew ironical.

"Are you really offended?" Alice pleaded.

"Child," he responded, in a strangely tender voice, "I was thinking; I have much to think of. I think you were making a remark about the young man. You have not told me how you chanced to go there."

Alice told all. In a simple, straightforward way the story was told, and Hollowell heard all she could relate. Much he marveled. Was it not remarkable how she had sought her unknown brother as if directed by an over-ruling hand?

"You saw him," murmured the judge.

"What did you think of him?"

"I saw nothing evil in him."

"What looked he like to you?"

"I don't understand."

"Was he like any one you know?"

"I think not," replied Alice, in surprise. "Do you think he is?"

"If No, no; of course not; but you seemed singularly interested. How did he receive you? Did he know who you were, and did he speak with anger of the judge who had sat at his trial?"

"Not a word of complaint did he make."

"He referred to the judge, didn't he?"

"Only when I mentioned who I was. I was afraid he might feel some resentment, and for that reason I hesitated to meet him, but he did not say an unkind thing, and was as kind to me as if I had been a friend. And I—well, really, I became interested in him."

Hollowell was breathing freer. He was glad to know Curtis had not mentioned that he, too, had visited the cell.

"Like you," the judge admitted, "I fail to see anything evil in the appearance of this young man. He is charged with a crime which some one will have to answer for heavily at the seat of divine judgment, but we need not feel hard toward him."

"Do you think him guilty?"

"The jury so decided. Do not let your mind run upon the subject, child."

"But it does, father. I cannot believe him guilty, and, when I think of Mary Wolf, my heart bleeds for her. Father, you are influential. Cannot you do something for him? Can't you secure a new trial for him?"

"The case has gone to another judge."

"But you can use your influence. Do not be indifferent to the matter because he is nothing to you. Think how it would be if he were as near to us as he is to Mary Wolf! Imagine how we should feel if he was ours, not hers—if he was of kin to us!"

Hollowell found it hard to keep his face steady.

"If you wish, I will look into the case more fully," he replied.

Alice threw her arms around his neck.

"Now you are my father, indeed!" she cried.

"I thank you warmly, and I hope you will find something of importance. Try to, for Mary's sake."

She had more to say, and she dwelt upon the virtues of the girl in whom she had become interested, and her belief in Curtis's innocence, as long as she deemed it prudent. When, at last, she left the room, Hollowell sat long in meditation.

"Strange, very strange!" he finally murmured. "Fate is always full of wonders, and never more than now."

There was a knock at the door. A messenger boy had come with a note, and the recipient opened it and read as follows:

"JUDGE HALLOWELL:—
You are wanted here immediately on important business. Do not delay, for I cannot otherwise be responsible for what may occur. Come promptly, and you need have no fear."

"DEBORAH PAINE."

He crushed the note in his hand.

"It will have to be attended to as requested!"

He burned the note, and then donned his hat and coat and started. He could not imagine what the call meant, but as he had no reason to suppose any new complication would occur, he was wise enough to believe a craving for money was at the bottom of it all. He reached the house without incident of importance, and was admitted by the old woman who had general charge of the building.

Not long had he been inside the house when there was a ring, again, at the bell. Answering it, she found a tall, peculiar-looking man there; one who was dressed poorly, but did not look in keeping with his attire.

"Madam," he tersely exclaimed, "do you want to earn fifty dollars?"

"Fifty dollars!" she gasped.

"Yes."

"Well, show me the chance and see!" was the quick reply.

"Let me enter the house and listen to what the man who has just come in has to say."

"Oh! you ask a good deal, now."

He displayed the promised money.

"This talks! I will make no disturbance in your place, madam. All I ask is the chance I have mentioned."

"You won't break in on him—"

"No, no; I tell you I will be still as the grave. Can you place me where I can listen?"

"Yes."

"Do it quickly."

The money was the god of conviction to the woman, and she took up the case with the zeal of one bought as she was, utterly. She admitted the stranger and conducted him to a small room on the same floor with the Paines. Circumstances favored the would-be spy, and she was able to place him where he could both see and hear all.

"Now you can go," he added.

She went, and he—Chief Claxton—gave all his attention to the interview in the rooms beyond.

Hollowell was with Deborah and Salome. Their conversation had not progressed far, as was to be seen by what followed.

"If this is merely a summons for money," the judge was saying, suspiciously, "what need was there of this sudden call to me?"

"Simply that we need the money," Deborah replied.

"Are you going to leave the city?"

"No."

"Then why the haste you did not mention before?"

"We have bills to pay—"

"Enough! How much do you want?"

Deborah looked at Salome, as if to get strength for the demand.

"Twenty thousand dollars!" she then boldly answered.

"What?"

"That is the sum."

"Do you realize what a sum you ask for?—do you understand it is a small fortune in itself?"

"We understand it is the price of silence," coolly replied Deborah.

"Dearly bought."

"Is not the peace it will bring worth the sum?"

"Hollowell was silent, looking down and meditating deeply. The woman seemed to fear the result, for she went on, presently, in a hurried way:

"Pay us this money and the world will never know you are the father of a man who lies in the Tombs under sentence of death, and it will never know that you have a wife living besides the one you call so before the public. No; the world shall not know that here"—she pointed to Salome—"is your one and only legal wife!"

Hollowell raised his head with an air of firmness.

"There must be conditions!" he declared.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ABOUT STOLEN GOODS.

DEBORAH quietly asked:

"What is the condition?"

"That you and she leave New York at once, and permanently, and that before you go you sign a paper which I will draw up," Hollowell answered.

The last part of the condition did not seem to impress Deborah especially, but she hesitated before she made reply:

"It is not easy for us to leave the city, ill as Salome is."

"I will see that all possible is done to make your departure easy, and free from all danger to health or anything else."

"Will you pay for our going—pay all expenses?"

"If you wish, though I do not see that it would make any great gap in the twenty thousand dollars."

"That money weighs heavily on your soul, don't it?" Salome demanded, bitterly. "You see it as large as a mountain, when you should be glad to give it to me. The woman who rules in your house, but has no right there, has access to your coffers at all times, while I, your only legal wife, have to beg for the few miserable dollars you consent to dole out!"

"I have refused you nothing."

"I never had anything from you. When we lived in that little town in Pennsylvania, long before you ever met the present Mrs. Hollowell, you gave me only a small cottage, while she has had a mansion. Our child had only enough to keep the breath of life in him, while her child has the fat of the land. I judge by that, that men like legal wives and children less than others. Now, you will let our child die on the gallows, and let me want for food and the necessities of life."

It was an irritable complaint, but Hollowell received it with unwavering patience.

"Considering I only knew a few days ago that young Curtis was our son, and I supposed you dead through all the years until the same date, and that, since you brought yourself again to my attention I have refused nothing, I must express the opinion that your complaint is not well founded."

"That's it; no good word for me!"

"Let my acts speak for me—"

"They have spoken in the past."

"If you failed through twenty years to let me know you were alive it is not my fault."

"Nothing is your fault!"

"We waste words in speaking thus—"

"Yes; you do not care to speak of your sentenced son and your cast-off wife!"

The judge turned to Deborah.

"Let us talk of business," he suggested, with patient fortitude. "Can you leave New York as soon as you get this money?"

"I suppose so."

"All shall be as you say. The paper I draw up will be to the point, and will shut off any further demands upon me. It is an unalterable condition of your receiving the sum of money referred to."

Salome gave indications of having more to say, but Deborah silenced her with a quick and warning look. The older woman was too wise to allow matters to progress in the channel they had entered that evening, and she reached out only for the blackmail desired.

"We will sign any paper in reason," she replied. "We do not wish to interfere with the happiness of your home, if there is any. In saying that, I do not claim any high reasons! I know if Salome put forward her claim as your wife we should never derive any good from it, while the money will be of practical value. We will do all in reason. Give us the cash, and we will sign off all rights and never trouble you, henceforth."

"All shall be done as you say," Hollowell answered, with an air of relief.

"And Homer Curtis?—will you let our son die?" asked Salome, who seemed in an especially vicious mood.

"I asked once before if you had any idea who really did the deed for which I believe he is unjustly sentenced. If you have, for heaven's sake, speak and do not let an innocent man—do not let him suffer!"

"I know not who did the deed."

"This is true," added Deborah. "We are perfectly candid when we say this. As I have told you before, we did not know of his whereabouts until the papers were full of the tragedy, and as to the real criminal, if he is not the one, we know nothing."

"Enough! You shall have the money as promised."

Hollowell rose, and was escorted to the door by Deborah.

Chief Claxton had been a close listener to all this, but he found he could not listen, as he desired, to anything more. Deborah wheeled Salome's chair into the next room, and all opportunity to act the spy upon them was at an end for the time. He did not, however, give up hope of hearing them talk in private, later on.

He sought the old woman he had bribed before, and the promise of more money in the future was enough to touch her cupidity anew. For such a generous giver she could afford to work, and certain arrangements were made which might be of value subsequently.

The detective then left the house.

Of course Hollowell had gone his way, and there was no more for Claxton to do in that quarter. He went home at once, and he gave no token of excitement over his discoveries.

"The woman Salome claims the judge as her legal husband, and he does not deny the alleged fact. We must, therefore, admit it to be a fact in reality. Singular state of life for the upright judge, yet I can well believe his honor has no smirch."

"Next, both admit that Homer Curtis is their son. Still more striking! Hollowell is not well placed; he is badly placed. The case waxes remarkable. But who killed Morris Strong?"

"All these parties profess not to know, and if I ever find they do know, I shall be surprised."

"Well, we will see what can be found out elsewhere. If I can make Oakes confess, as I hope to do, that he has been selling illegal goods to the late Morris Strong, one point in Curtis's favor will have been gained. I am sleepy, and I think I will retire."

Claxton yawned, and, going to bed, was asleep almost as soon as he touched the bed. Verily, he had the all-important faculty of dropping business as soon as business was over.

He was not permitted to sleep well, that night. Half an hour later he was called up, and a messenger being admitted, this report was made:

"Oakes wishes to see you, and says he will tell all he knows."

"Time and tide wait for no man," remarked Claxton, philosophically, "and a repentant thief must not be ignored in the hour of his softening of heart, especially when this condition is brought about by a lack of food for his stomach. Such repentance should be encouraged."

Dressing with these remarks he went out and was soon at the house where his prisoner had been put away. Oakes had been allowed to go hungry. He was not put in danger of starvation, but his feelings had been touched through his appetite, if not in any other way.

Claxton was in the house for some time. He then went out and found another man. The

latter was a notary-public, and though he was not accustomed to doing work at such an hour, he responded freely to the call from such a source.

Later, still, Claxton left the house with his coat tightly buttoned. Once more in his own quarters he sat down and, lighting a cigar, read the following document, which bore at the end the record of the notary that all therein had been sworn to in his presence:

"I, Bartholomew Oakes, of the city, county and State of New York, do make the statement below of my own free will, and swear that all is strictly true, and in accordance with fact, which is embraced in the confession which follows:

"About two years ago there came to me a man named Morris Strong. I had known him ever since he was a boy, and had often taken him out in my boat. As he grew up he went into business, and when he came to me on the occasion mentioned he made a proposition to me which was as herein stated:

"He said that in his business he could make a good deal of money if he had a bold and willing confederate, and he proposed to me that, as I had an extensive acquaintance with watermen, I get certain ones of them to steal goods from along the river-front, deliver to me, and I to him (Strong), and he would sell these goods in his store and divide the profits with me.

"I unwisely yielded to this proposal, and the work was begun.

"I had known various watermen whom I knew to be river thieves by profession, and to them I went. It was not hard to make the bargain for they trusted me, and we entered on the scheme as planned.

"Ever since we have kept up the illegal traffic, or we did until Morris Strong was killed. I received goods from various watermen, and Strong took them from me, knowing that all had been stolen. We divided the profits, as agreed upon.

"He told me several times that his partner, Homer Curtis, was not aware of the illegal goods in any way, he being able to keep the fact from him because he (Strong) handled the books so much, but that he had much trouble in fixing matters so that Curtis would not see the goods were not among those regularly purchased.

"He always represented to me that Curtis was of such a nature that he would not agree to any such illegal traffic.

"In regard to the killing of Strong I know nothing. I have no means of knowing whether the right man was arrested when Curtis was taken into custody. This much I will say, however: I was among those who saw the goods which made the trouble between the partners (Curtis and Strong), and I am prepared to swear that these goods were the same I had but lately received from a waterman named Benjamin Wolf, and myself delivered to Strong to be sold in the store of Curtis & Strong.

"Wolf stole them from some store near the river, and for the very purpose for which they were used.

"And I further swear that from this same Benjamin Wolf I had received such goods all the time I was engaged in the illegal traffic myself, and that he has long been known to me as a river thief.

"I make this statement without malice toward any one, and declare it to be true in all respects."

"BARTHOLOMEW OAKES."

Having reached the last line Chief Claxton laid the paper down.

"Very kind in Mr. Oakes to depose!" he murmured.

He waved the paper back and forth for some time and then put it away in his pocket.

"Better than some things which would bring more in open market," he remarked, and then went to bed and passed the rest of the night in sound slumber.

When he awoke he read the document again. "Men sometimes retract in court," he remarked, "and then, again, one cannot have too much proof. It will do no harm to shadow Ben a trifle."

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHAT WAS DONE ON THE PIER.

BRINY BEN was seated on the end of a pier when Duncan Davies and the latter's new friend, "Dan Murphy," came along and joined him. Not yet had the waterman come to look upon Daniel with favor, and he glared with all his ugliness when they advanced to him.

"Hello, Benjamin!" greeted Dan, jovially, "how goes it?"

"Uh!"

This was Ben's sole reply; a grunt in keeping with his character.

"Fishing?"

"Can't ye see I ain't?"

"Well, I don't see any fish, it is true, but there are fishers of men, as well as of other things."

The Water Wolf turned a pair of hostile eyes suddenly upon the speaker.

"What do ye mean?" he demanded, suspiciously.

"Well, Duncan and I have just taken a few good dollars from some fellows who thought they could play poker until they saw us. That's what I call being fishers of men."

"Uh!"

Ben grunted again in the old way, and the suspicion went out of his manner in a measure, but he sat in silence while the other two men talked glibly. He did not take any more kindly to Davies's liking for Dan than he did to Dan himself, and he wished the intimacy dropped.

Anon, Davies sent Ben's suspicions up again.

"Dan wants to go out with us in your boat some time, Ben."

The Wolf looked up with eyes all aflame.

"Ef Mister Murphy wants ter go boatin', he kin do so on his own hook!" he exclaimed. "I've got all I kin do ter attend to my own boat, an' my own business. Others kin do the same!"

Davies looked chagrined, but Dan took it all without the least sign of annoyance.

"I suppose you have to keep busy, Ben," was his unmoved reply. "The confounded politicians are tinkering with the tariff all the time, and it just keeps us small fry so back in the rear that we have to hustle for bread and skim-milk. Why can't they send sensible men to Congress?"

At that moment Dan Murphy did not care whether Smith, Jones or Brown represented him and his friends in Congress, but he directed the remark to Davies with an object which did not fail. He succeeded in getting Davies to talk politics, and the skillful change of subject took about all the edge off from Ben's surly refusal.

The Wolf did not warm up, however; he sat in sullen silence and let them talk to their hearts' content, but he had nothing to say.

Dan was not foolish enough to try and force his way. He let Ben sufficiently alone not to annoy him, but not enough to give rise to the suspicion that he was angry at the refusal of the boat.

Dan and Davies soon moved on.

Dan had come there that day to make a last effort to get into the Water Wolf's good graces. He had failed, and then he let it rest. When he left Davies, he walked on in a thoughtful mood.

His course was homeward. When he arrived there he soon transformed himself into Chief Claxton again, but this form of his being was but temporary. He proceeded to assume another disguise, and though it was not pronounced, he made himself look sufficiently unlike Dan Murphy so that a casual view of him would not betray him as the same person.

"I can now look to Briny Ben with some degree of success, perhaps," he murmured.

He once more left the house.

The Water Wolf was not busy in those days. He had reason to think he had better not do too much river work until there was a change in a certain quarter. The disappearance of Oakes was not to his liking.

It did not occur to him that Oakes had fallen into the hands of the police, but, always ready to suspect treachery, he was afraid the receiver of stolen goods had decided to retire from the calling and might see fit to drag some of his old clients into trouble.

Feeling in this mood the Wolf haunted the piers as of old, but went not on night raids, nor broke the law as he had before.

Fear is sometimes more powerful than conscience.

That afternoon he was prowling along the piers, talking with his numerous acquaintances at various points, some of whom were honest, and some as disregarding of the rights of property as himself.

He thought he was duly watchful, as one ought to be when he acts the river thief, but he would have been unequal to the occasion had he not received outside help.

When he was on his return a fellow thief said to him:

"Somebody is followin' you."

"There is?" cried Ben, with a start.

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"Don't look around, man! Be prudent. Somebody did follow you up the street, and I seen him jest now as you stopped to talk with me. He's out o' sight, now, but he's still in the ring."

"Is it a detective?" the Wolf asked, with an ugly scowl.

"Don't look like one."

"Ef anybody is follerin' me, he had better look out!"

"It may not be anything serious, but men in our biz want ter be careful. Don't let him git onto you, but be wise an' you'll git onto him! See?"

Briny Ben was not a fool, and when he had made up his mind to be cunning, he had the requisites to do it. When he moved on it was with his eyes open, and the result was that he had view of the watcher.

He did not recognize "Dan Murphy," but he did decide that he was being spied upon for no good, as far as his interests were concerned. He went home, and saw he was followed to that place.

After that he lost sight of the spy, but he was cunning in an endeavor to learn if the relief was temporary or permanent. There was in the house a man he could trust, and he induced this man to go out and survey the coast.

When the man returned he reported that the spy was lingering near.

Then all of Ben's anger rose.

"I don't know who he is, nor what he's drivin' at, but, by thunder! nobody kin spy on me! I'll give him a chance ter do it after dark, an' ef he tries, there will be music. Did the fool think he could watch me and I not know of it?"

The Wolf had no reason to boast of his triumph, since it was due wholly to the eyes of others, and not his own, but it did him good to think he had been a victor, and he gloated over the supposed craft of it all.

Not until nine o'clock did he stir out; then he made ready and left the house. He sauntered up the street, keeping up a pretense of surveying the piers, but he had his regard directed more sharply elsewhere, and he soon found he had made no mistake.

His hand sought his pocket, where it found a ready weapon.

"Ef he wants ter see me, I'm ready!" the waterman muttered.

Near at hand was a pier which was then so little occupied that he had reason to believe it would be free from watchmen and all others. Out on this he walked in an easy, slouching fashion, and sat down on the further end.

He had taken position where he could look back without showing the least turn of his head, and the result was soon to his liking.

The spy followed and concealed himself behind a box.

"Cunnin' as the Old Nick!" Ben muttered, doing justice at last. "Yes; he's all o' that, but it won't do him no good. I don't know who he is, but he's my enemy, or he wouldn't be foolin' around on my track. I'll see who he is; yes, I will!"

Rising, he walked down the pier. As he neared the box he was careful to look the other way, but he suddenly turned, when opposite it, and sprang at and around the obstacle.

He had the spy before him, and at once laid hold of him.

"I've got ye!" he cried, preparing for a struggle.

To his surprise the spy stood still.

"Yes; you've got me," he admitted. "What of it?"

"Well, you're a cool one!"

"Why shouldn't I be cool?"

"Cool? Durn it! will you be cool when I've ketched you like this?"

"I am caught, but why should I get excited? Do you think it much of a catch?"

"Do I? Wal, you bet I do! You've been spyin' on me, an' now I've got the whip-row. Durn it! I'll fix ye!"

"My dear sir, you seem to be in error," was the calm response. "Why do you think so wildly? Spying on you? Ridiculous! I have all I can do to attend to my own affairs. Say, friend, can't you give me a dime to buy a night's lodging?"

His composure was so great that Ben might have been staggered in spite of circumstances, but ill luck brought a discovery which changed all things.

"Thunder!" the Wolf exclaimed, "you are Dan Murphy!"

The cornered detective was quick to accept the situation.

"Dan I am, dead broke and in a hole. Say, Ben, this sporting life is a bit stale when a fellow is in hard luck!"

"So it's you?"

"It is, sure."

"I hev you, at last!"

"You've got me; yes. But why such violence, Ben? Are you jealous because I'm down on my luck and—"

"Say, let up on that, will ye? Man, I'm dead on ter you! I don't know who you be, but I always felt it in my bones that you was a man ter be avoided and looked out fer. I never trusted you an atom, an' now I know ye as you be. You've played the spy on me all the afternoon, an' now we'll hev a settlin'!"

"Ben, you're crazy! Why should I spy on you?"

"Yes, why?"

"It is my question."

"I kin give an answer, I s'pose; it's because you're a sneak o' some sort; I don't know what. But I've got ye, ye mean reptile!"

"You was violent. If you don't want to be my friend you needn't, but Davies is, and I ask fair play from you or—"

"No threats!"

"Have I made any?"

"You come nigh it, you sneak!"

"You are wrong in the assertion, and as for the name you have applied to me, I am tired of it, and of your course all through. Take your hand off from me!"

"When I get ready!"

"Now!"

The detective made an effort to wrench himself away, but Ben held fast, and the result was a struggle. At first it seemed to be of but trivial importance, but Claxton was quite in earnest in his demand, and the Wolf was ripe for mischief. One thing was in his mind which Claxton did not look for, and it speedily developed.

Ben found, very much to his surprise, that he had met his equal in strength and skill, and his plan of forcing from the spy a confession of his intentions suddenly changed.

Acting on the theory that there was no time like the present, he swung his hand around to the pocket where his knife rested, and there he found no trouble in connecting. His fingers

closed around the weapon, and it came out with a jerk.

From the first they had been near the edge of the pier, and their movements had taken them nearer. Neither noticed this.

Briny Ben did not wait to gather his balance, but swept the knife around with a vicious blow. It found some solid substance, and the Wolf knew he had struck home.

Under the force and surprise of the stroke Claxton instinctively leaped back. His feet found no support, and with a last, unavailing grasp at Ben he fell over the edge.

There was a splash, and the Water Wolf stood alone on the pier.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WOLF SEEKS HIS DEN.

FOR a moment the waterman stood panting on the edge of the pier, looking only downward, but, as he saw no more of his late antagonist, he instinctively turned the other way.

The place was far from one of safety for the work he had done, and he feared to see that he had witnesses to the crime. But he seemed to be alone, and the first panic wore off.

Still, he was not in a calm mood. Believing he had done murder, he felt the dread of the halter which is such a wholesome fear to the evil-minded, and he saw a foe in every shadow. Long he stood and looked, but the night was as usual. He seemed to have all the place to himself and his crime.

His confidence returned, and then he was all right. Conscience he had none, and the bully in his nature came to the front.

"Wal, he's found out what it is ter meddle with Ben Wolf!" was the triumphant exclamation. "Nobody kin blame me, fer he brought it onter his head, hisself!"

The logic was not exactly clear, but he believed in it, or seemed to then.

Relieved of immediate apprehension, he thought of his foe and, lying flat on the pier, gazed down into the water. The night was not light enough for the purpose he had in view, and he could see nothing. He was looking for a body. There had been no cry from the water, and he was next to sure the work had been done well and effectually.

Each motion of the waves he watched, as far as it was revealed to him, but on none could he see a burden drifting which would tell what he wanted to know.

"Kin it be he got out of it, an' is clingin' ter the pier, below?" the Wolf wondered. "Et might be—but, no; et can't be. He never uttered a cry when he went down, nor after, an' the knife must 'a' done its work right ter the point."

His memory recalled to the weapon, he looked for and found it on the pier near his feet. One thing at once attracted his attention.

"Blood!" he muttered. "Yes; I did my work well, an' ther's no more need o' wonderin'. I'll git out o' here in short order!"

Hesitating for a moment he then flung the knife into the water, and as it sunk he turned and walked rapidly away from the scene of his crime. As he turned into the street he could not help felicitating himself upon his good luck in escaping all notice.

None had seen anything of the deed, as far as he could discover, and when he met a policeman that officer passed him by without even a glance.

The Wolf entered his own house and sat down in a corner. He lighted his pipe and sought due consolation from the fragrant weed. As the smoke rolled away he exulted more than ever over his good luck.

"No more monkey biz from Dan Murphy!" he muttered. "I always knew he was a sneak, an' now he's got what he deserved. I wonder ef he was a police spy? He might 'a' been; I dunno. Anyhow, he won't trouble no more."

While this seemed to be true Ben was not in his best humor. He realized that something unpleasant might possibly come of the affair, and could not wholly banish it from his mind, as he would have been glad to do.

Mary was busy about the room. He had not addressed her since coming in, and she was equally silent. Presently, in passing him, her gaze was drawn to something which made her stop suddenly. She stood gazing at him in a strange way, her color varying as she looked.

He saw a part, if not all of this, and his anger blazed up.

"What in thunder be you starin' at?" he roughly demanded.

"Father, there is blood on your clothes!"

She made the assertion impulsively, and was sorry for it the moment it was said. In the past it had been her plan to ignore what was likely to annoy Briny Ben, and now she realized she had made a mistake. If she had doubted it, he gave proof at once.

Into his eyes flashed a light which might have startled a person of the best of nerves. He half rose and then settled back. He felt that he ought to curb his wrath, but was not equal to the occasion.

After a vain effort to conquer himself he broke forth:

"You lie when you say it; you lie, an' you know you do!"

Mary discreetly subsided.

"Where do ye see any blood?" demanded the Water Wolf, warmly. "You don't see any, fer there ain't none ter see. Blood! Gammon! You lie when you say it!"

The ferocious glare of his barbarian eyes was not what the girl would care to dare, and she tried to quiet the storm.

"Very well; I may be mistaken—"

"Et ain't 'very wal.' How dare you lie ter me—"

"I say I know nothing about it; let it rest," answered Mary, with surprising calmness.

"Oh! you'd like ter let et rest, wouldn't ye? Like ter creep out of it after puttin' sech a charge onter me—"

"Even if true, what does it signify?"

The Wolf suddenly collapsed. True, what did it signify? She had not insinuated that the blood came from man, dog or cat. By all of his talk he was simply bringing it into more importance. He took a new turn.

"Of course; of course; it wouldn't mean nothin' ef et was there, which it ain't. That stuff ye see is red paint, gal. I was around when Sam Billin's was paintin' his—painting some work he had ter do. But where do ye see the paint, gal?"

Mary was sick at heart, but she indicated the point. It was on his coat, and next to where he had rested against Dan Murphy when he struck the blow.

Ben took the coat off and cleansed the "paint" away as well as he could. When it was done he sat down to meditate again.

Events were not to his liking. He had stabbed Dan Murphy in the heat of passion, and though there was no remorse, there was some wholesome fear. Crime is never too well hidden to be beyond the reach of possibilities, and with Mary in possession of so much he was worried.

"I've got ter get out o' New York!"

So he thought, and, this decided, he began to look further.

"Deb Paine don't git along fast with that money. I don't know whether she is on the square or not, but et's in her power ter git the cash an' skip, herself. I don't trust ter her; I must cut out fer myself. I must hev the shiners, myself, an' I'll proceed ter take 'em in. But how?"

It was a question not easy to settle. It looked as if Judge Hallowell was the most promising source in one way, but, really, the Wolf was afraid to know too much of him. The safer way was to go to Mrs. Mirabel Hallowell, and there he found some objection.

She was, he presumed, a happy wife. Would she pay much to know she had no right to the name she bore?

Carefully the waterman went over the matter. There was much to be considered, and he was not sure of his best course, but as he progressed he arrived at one conclusion.

"I'll see her; I'll work the game fer all it's worth, an' ef it don't pan out one way, et will another. I'm jest ez sure o' my grip ez ef I had the cash in my fims now!"

This conviction made him feel better, and, indeed, he did have a strong case.

"Et's everybody fer himself," he decided. "Deb an' her hopeful daughter will howl like Comanche Injuns, but down they go ef the interests o' Ben Wolf demand it!"

He rose and went to the window. Despite his complete triumph over Dan Murphy, he was not at ease. What if the man had escaped death in some way? It did not seem probable, but the pier was capable of a good many things. He might have escaped, possibly.

So the Wolf looked out of the window and dreaded to see the spy hovering near.

"But I reckon he's gone, an' I'll jest hustle around an' get my nest feathered; then I'll skip the town an' be seen no more here. New Orleans is about my size, I reckon!"

In the corner he sat and smoked until he grew sleepy; then he went to bed. He dared not caution Mary not to mention the alleged paint, but his mind dwelt on it not a little.

"Ef she does blab, it'll be the worst job she ever did!" he muttered.

The night passed.

In the morning Ben looked sharply at Mary when they met, but, if she placed any weight upon the events of the night before, she gave no evidence of it. He could see no change in her, and as he had the lack of faith in her which ignorant people are prone to have in those whom they consider weaklings in the race of life, he thought it possible that she really placed no dependence on the incident of the blood-stains.

Shortly after, Duncan Davies put in an appearance.

"Ben, have you seen Dan Murphy?" the younger man asked.

The Wolf's eyes glittered.

"No, I ain't."

"He was to meet me at the corner above, this morning."

"Wal, the corner ain't here."

"I'm aware of that."

"I don't know nothin' about yer man Dan, an' I don't want ter!" added Ben, sullenly.

"You needn't be so ugly about it."

"I reckon I have a right ter be ez I please."

Eff you like Dan so mighty wal, why don't you stay with him all the while?"

Davies began to be excited.

"Say, you sore-headed old bloke! what is eatin' you, anyhow? Are you jealous because I speak to Dan?"

"I don't care a cuss fer you nor Dan, neither! Eff you want him, go ter him, but don't never mention his name ter me ag'in. See?"

Duncan was used to hearing outbreaks from the waterman, and he would not have thought anything of the present one had not Ben's manner been offensive in the extreme. This angered the gambler in earnest, and he bodey retorted.

"Yes; I do see! I see you think you can run this whole universe, including my share of it, but you are mightily mistaken. If you see any more of me, you'll come to me to do it; and if you come and give me any more guff, I'll punch your eye for you. Perhaps you see that! You can go to blazes, Ben Wolf!"

And the angry speaker strode out of the house.

The Wolf winked fast and hard. He had not intended to quarrel with Davies, and had not realized the possibility of it until it was too late. When Davies broke forth he had not tried soon enough to appease him, and now the damage was done he knew Davies's nature well enough to be aware it would do no good to try and make the trouble up while his fit of anger was on.

"I'm sorry fer this!" Ben confessed, to himself. "The boy is red-hot, an' he kin make et hot fer me, too, ef he sees fit. He could tell all about my river work— But then he wouldn't dare!"

He tried to console himself with the latter idea, but it did not wholly answer requirements. Ben had a weak record in the view of law, and it worried him to think that one who knew it so well was in such a mood.

"One thing is sure," he decided, after a long period of thought. "I've got ter git my fine work in at once. I'll go ter Missus Hallowell this very mornin', an' see what kin be done."

He made ready and started for the judge's house. That point he reached in due time and rung the bell.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TRAIL OF GUILT.

THAT morning Alice Hallowell came to Edward Acton.

"Mr. Vinton," she said, calling him by his fictitious name, "may I ask whom I saw you with at the corner of Broadway and Thirtieth street, yesterday morning?"

Edward started. He and Chief Claxton had been as careful as possible in having their interviews, as a rule, but, on the occasion mentioned, he had met the detective by chance at the point named, and they had stopped in conversation for some minutes.

All this he remembered, and his face flushed guiltily, but he rallied and tried to look innocent.

"I remember I was out for a walk, but I know so many people—that is, I have made a good many acquaintances since I came here—I may have met any one of them."

He was annoyed at his own awkwardness, but if Alice noticed it, she did not make any comment.

"He was a tall, slender man, with a smooth face, and a general look like that of a minister, though I don't think he was one."

"I think that must have been—a—I do not recall the name, now, though I was recently introduced to him."

This uncandid reply made Alice look disappointed, but she did not seem to see Acton's embarrassment.

"What do you know of him?" she continued.

"I? Oh! nothing."

"What is he? Is he a gentleman?"

"As far as I know, he is."

"Where does he live?"

"I think I was not told," replied guilty Acton, wishing himself well away.

"Well, I don't like that man!"

"Not?"

"No!" with emphasis.

"May I ask why?"

"He has been acting the spy on me!"

"On you?" gasped Acton.

"Yes. Twice when I've been on the street I have seen him; and he regards me in a very intent, and yet a very secret way, as if he thinks he is too wily to be seen at it. Worse than all, he once followed me when I was out, and only disappeared when I entered the house of the friend I had gone to visit. When I came out he was gone, much to my relief, but the fact remains that he did follow me. Now, I don't know his object, but I am more than displeased; I am afraid of the man. Why should he follow me—why should he look at me so strangely?"

Acton was in a fever of dismay.

"Has he made any effort to get acquainted with you?"

"No."

"He may be an idle fellow who has nothing better to do."

"I have heard of such men, but he does not seem like them. I cannot feel that such is his motive. I think it is more, and though I am

unable to tell what it is, I am afraid of him—yes, afraid!"

The assertion was colored by a shiver, and Acton was in a fever of indignation. He could not overlook such a step on Claxton's part, he thought. If the detective was going to dog Alice, the sooner he, Acton, was out of the game, the better it would be for his honor.

"I am sure you need have no fear," he declared. "He would not dare to annoy you, and if I see him—"

"Oh! don't tell him I mentioned this!" Alice cried.

"Rest easy; I can get at it without betraying anything. I know just how to deal with such a man, and I'll see to it he does not worry you further."

"You are very kind, Mr. Vinton."

"It is a pleasure to help you, Miss Hollowell."

"You are always thoughtful of my welfare. It does not seem as if we have been acquainted such a short time, we have got along so well together. But then," she archly added, "you came well recommended!"

Acton felt the blood mounting to his face.

Yes, he had come well recommended—with false recommendations.

How he hated himself! How every hour in that house weighed upon him, and his duplicity grew more and more difficult to endure!

He did not want to talk about the man who looked like a minister, and was glad that Alice was willing to change the subject, but he had resolved to see Claxton at once, and put an end to so much underhand work.

As soon as possible he left Alice, but his resolution to leave the house at once was baffled. He met Mrs. Hollowell, and she had something to say. She was very much like Alice, changed by the passage of years, and was in all ways an amiable and interesting lady. She retained the slenderness of youth, and did not in any way look her years.

For awhile Acton conversed with her, and then he had the opportunity to leave the house.

"Why can't these people see me as I am?" he wondered, in despair. "Why can any one who plays such a Judas role so veil his treachery? I should think it would show in his face as the sun shows at noonday. Of all human beings a hypocrite is the worst, and that is what I am. And they do not see it! Well, they will see later on, and then they will hate me as I now hate myself!"

In this unhappy frame of mind the young man pursued his way to Chief Claxton's residence. Arriving there he rung the door-bell.

"Mr. Claxton in?" he asked, of the servant who appeared.

"No, sir; he ain't."

"I am sorry, for I wanted to see him particularly."

"So do others."

"How is that?"

"Well, he had important engagements for last evening and this morning, and the gentlemen he was to see are all broke up. They say it is going to be a heavy loss to them if he don't come quick."

"When was he here last?"

"He came in just before six o'clock, but did not stay for dinner. He said he must hurry through some other matters, as he would have to be back by nine o'clock. We are worried about him, sir, for he never fails to keep an engagement."

"Where did he go when he went away?"

"He said something about being by the river, sir."

Acton began to be worried, too. He had not forgotten the river thieves, and Claxton's campaign against them.

It was impossible to learn more, for the detective had never made a practice of telling his secrets to any one, and least of all to the people who conducted the house.

Worry was increased, however, by the arrival of the men who were to meet Claxton. They came with their minds all rent and excited by the situation. They were all men who knew the detective well, and not for a moment did they think of blaming him for the delay. They took a very different view of the case.

"Something is wrong with him!" declared one.

"What can it be?" asked Acton.

"That I don't know. He may be in some trivial trouble which he will surmount soon, or it may be far more serious. You are aware that a detective in New York City takes his life in his hands whenever he goes out in his professional work. I hope Claxton has not lost his life!"

So ran the conversation, and Edward grew truly worried. Recollection of the river thieves did not die out of his mind, and he determined to go down the line of the piers and see if Davies or Ben Wolf was visible.

He went, and soon found himself near the house of the Water Wolf. He looked for the latter, but saw no sign of him. He did see, anon, the Wolf's daughter. Mary chanced to look out of the window. The recognition was mutual, and she made a quick gesture, calling him toward the house.

He went, and was soon within. Mary appear-

ed troubled and ill at ease, and she did not long keep him uncertain as to the cause.

"Mr. Acton, I want your advice!" she exclaimed.

"I shall be glad to help you if I can," he replied.

"And you will regard the matter as secret?"

"Yes."

"Then you shall hear all. I am thinking of leaving this house."

The announcement would not have surprised Edward at any other time. His only wonder was that she had been able to stay as long as she had done under such circumstances. Now, however, he felt sure from her manner it was no ordinary cause which had led her to that decision.

"Why are you going?" he inquired.

"You know what my father is?"

"Somewhat."

"You can surmise that my existence has never been one of pleasure, living as I do. You must be aware, too, that Benjamin Wolf does not bear a good name. He calls himself a 'longshoreman,' but has never been known to work at the calling. How does he live? I don't know, and no one else seems to. Rumor has not been without association with his reputation."

"And this is growing on you?"

"It has given me much doubt, and much of fear and worry, but there is something new."

She paused and shivered, as if recollection was far from pleasant.

"Last night," she went on, presently, "my father came in and sat down in his usual place, in his usual mood. I saw, however, that he had something unusual on his mind. I gave it no heed until I chanced to see upon his clothing fresh, red stains of some sort. I spoke without due care, and exclaimed: 'There is blood on your coat!' or something like that."

"You did?" cried Acton.

"Yes—"

"And was there blood there?"

"I believe there was, though my father, after falling into a rage and violently accusing me of lying, declared it was only red paint. So he said, but he hastened to cleanse the garments with great care, and regarded me with what I thought suspicious ill-will. Now, I do not know that the stains were those of blood, and I don't know where it came from if it was such."

Acton was beset with a fear that he did know—but I am growing afraid of Benjamin Wolf. He is not a good man; he is violent of temper and, at the very best unscrupulous, and I am afraid of him, now!"

Edward had listened raptly.

All this had deep meaning to him.

He had just been wondering if Chief Claxton had fallen into the hands of river thieves, as represented by Ben Wolf, and now came this story, with its coloring of blood.

He regarded it as being far more serious than he dared tell to Mary. Was Claxton's absence explained? It was only a suspicion, but it gave him a very uneasy feeling.

Mary had ceased speaking, but he was not ready with his answer. What could he say of Ben? What could he think of Chief Claxton?

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SECRET SPREADS.

MRS. MIRABEL HALLOWELL was surprised when she was informed that a rough man was below who wished to see her, but as she was not a victim to false pride she did not let the fact that he was said to be rough of look and dress keep her from granting the interview he desired.

She went down.

Ben Wolf was there, but as she had not seen him before, or heard of him, his face conveyed no impression to her mind except that it was one which gave her an unpleasant feeling; that it was that of a man whose nature was not honorable or worthy.

He bowed and tried to be agreeable. His smile was a failure, however, for smiles were not frequent guests of his countenance, and he simply made a bad impression.

"I've come on biz!" he announced.

"I shall be pleased to hear you," Mrs. Hollowell responded, doubtfully.

"It's about you."

"About me?"

"Yes, mum. This is a funny world!"

She bowed, not knowing what else to do.

"You're a woman, an' I'm a gentleman," pursued Ben, "so I know how to feel for you."

"Is there trouble?"

"Nothin' new; it's an old trouble, an' one you ought ter hev known about long ago."

"Who should have told me?"

"Them who did you wrong."

"You puzzle me! Will you be so kind as to come to the point, immediately?"

It was courteously asked, though she was losing faith in the Water Wolf's ability to say anything worth hearing. He had assumed an air of mystery, but did not proceed to clear the mystery up. She began to think there was none, but she was soon undeceived.

"Be you prepared fer it?" asked Ben, even more mysteriously.

"Yes; go on."

The Wolf leaned forward and deeply ejaculated:

"You ain't yer husband's wifel!"

"Sir?" cried Mrs. Hollowell, startled.

"You ain't, sure ez gum!"

"And is this the object of your visit? Do you come here to insult me in my own—"

"Now, hold on; hold on! I'll tell ye why. You ain't his wife because he has another wife livin', an' she was his wife long before you was. See?"

Mrs. Hollowell was indignant, and her first impulse was to order the man from the house. She had the utmost confidence in the judge, who had been a kind, if not an affectionate, husband. This impelled her to refuse to hear the rough visitor further, but she conquered the impulse and determined to let him speak to his limit. Her voice was very calm as she replied, for she did not believe there was any occasion for excitement.

"No, sir; I do not see at all," she answered.

Ben scratched his bushy head.

"I thought I was plain enough, but ef I wa'n't, I'll try ter come more ter the point. You see, afore you ever see Judge Hollowell he had married another woman. She didn't die when he thought she ought ter, so he went ter work an' married you without regard ter the fact o' bigamy. Ez she is livin' now, you see yer claim ain't o' the best."

Mrs. Hollowell's face flushed.

"Of course you can prove this!" she returned, skeptically.

"I'd be a fool ter make the charge ef I couldn't, mum. Yes, I kin prove it, an' you kin hev all the evidence you want."

The confidence of the assertion staggered Mrs. Hollowell. Evil as he looked, the Wolf did not have the air of a man telling a lie.

"You say this wife is living?"

"Yes; an' the son."

"What son?"

"Why, didn't I say Hollowell had a son by the first wifel? Reckon I didn't, really, but sech is the case. Yes; there's a son, but he's a bad egg, an' he's now in the Tombs under sentence o' death fer murderin' a man; the judge's son is."

"You say you can prove all this?"

"Certain."

"How?"

"Wal, you kin go an' see the wife. I dunno whether you kin see the son or not, but he's in the Tombs, jest ez I say. Call there an' see him, ef you don't believe it. He's got a mark on him the judge won't dare deny—a birthmark on his arm, an' a mate ter one the judge has on his arm."

Mrs. Hollowell knew of the mark in the last case, and she began to take more interest in the matter. She had been patient when she did not think the charges worth noticing, because she could not understand the visitor's audacity. Now, it seemed worth pursuing further.

"What is the name of this man in the Tombs?"

"Homer Curtiss."

"And the wifel—where is she?"

"Way over on Sixteenth street."

"Not a very elaborate quarter for the wife of a judge."

"It's as good as she ever has had from him. You see, he deserted her, an' all she could do was ter settle down an' take et quiet. That was many years ago, mum."

"Why have you come to me with this tale?"

"I reckoned you might be willin' ter pay fer it."

"Why should I pay to know that there is another wife in my way?"

"Folks like ter know facts, ef they ain't pleasant ones."

Mrs. Hollowell was silent. She studied the face of the man before her. She noticed how evil it was in all ways, and blamed herself for listening to him, but she was in a mood to pursue the question until the end was reached.

"If you want pay, why don't you go to Judge Hollowell? Don't you see he would be willing to pay more to hide a secret than I would to unearth one?"

"Oh! the wife an' her mother are workin' him; this is a side issue o' mine, where I come in."

"Can you tell me where this alleged wife is that you tell about?"

"I said the street was Sixteenth; now I say the number is on that piece o' paper. I put et down so there could be no mistake. All you hev ter do is ter go there, an' you kin see them—the wife an' her mother."

"Shall you be there?"

"Wal, hardly; et wouldn't be so very safe fer me ter hang around at that particular writin'. The women would be so strong opposed ter my get in tellin' you that they would be likely ter claw my eyes out."

"Are you a friend of theirs?"

"I was once, but we kinder fell out by the wayside."

Mrs. Hollowell had other questions to ask, but the meat had been extracted from the kernel already, and Ben dealt mostly in repetitions when he answered. He was voluble enough, but the story had been told. One thing more he had to say, and he finally twirled his hat a bit nervously and added:

"I've got ter go, now. Is there any more ter say?"

"I know of nothing."

"I've told you somethin' of importance. I am a poor man—"

"Enough! If I find your information true, and you will give me your address, you shall not fail to reap your reward. I will pay you for your warning."

It was a test question. She expected a demand for immediate pay, which would have aroused all her doubts, but Ben had decided it was not to be expected she would be ready to hand over anything until she knew more, and he very cheerfully responded:

"All right, mum; look it up, an' then you kin see me."

He handed over another paper announcing that it had his address.

"Drop a line to that place, an' I'll come ter you any time. Now, I'm off. Sorry for you, mum, but men will do sech things."

The Water Wolf did not want to see the judge, and he made haste to get out of the house.

Left alone, Mrs. Hollowell considered the matter for some time. She had not been deeply moved at any time; she was not thus moved now. It was all very annoying, but, despite Ben's readiness to defer money transactions, she was not prepared to believe her husband had any such chapter in his life, or such a multiplicity of wives, and this faith momentarily increased when she was alone.

"It is merely a scheme to obtain blackmail," she loyally thought. "Of course it would be very successful if it could be worked well, but I would as soon doubt my own existence as Otis Hollowell. I will go to him at once, and tell him— But why should I do such a foolish thing? He would think I doubted him. No; I'll not tell, and yet— This ought to be looked into."

She meditated long and carefully, and a plan finally occurred to her. Her eyes beamed.

"I'll proceed and prove this false, and then I'll go to Otis and let him know all. He shall be told how my faith was unwavering in him!"

The noble woman was zealous over her plan, and then eager to put it into execution.

She determined to go to the Sixteenth street house at once. She was too prudent to go alone, but this she did not have to do. She had a faithful man-servant who had been in her father's family before she was married, and she knew he was to be trusted. She would take him as a guard and settle all this scheme immediately.

She prepared for the journey, and then sent for the servant. He came, and they left the house together.

Contrary to her usual custom, she did not use a carriage, but made the journey to Sixteenth street by more humble ways. Before arriving she duly cautioned her guard against ever mentioning the visit, and he readily gave the pledge.

When they arrived at the Sixteenth street house Mrs. Hollowell's courage took a perceptible drop, but she would not give up. She rung the bell, and the old woman of the house appeared. It was not hard to make arrangements with her for the admittance of the servant on the condition that he should remain within call, but not enter the rooms of the Paines, for Mrs. Hollowell used the same persuasive means that Chief Claxton had employed so effectually on a former occasion—under the power of money the guardian of the place was open to argument.

Then she went to see Deborah and Salome, bearing no name, but simply stating that a lady desired to see them.

She soon returned.

"They want your name."

"Tell them it is Hollowell."

The woman disappeared once more.

Mrs. Hollowell waited anxiously. She had come thus far, but would it be of avail? Was she on the verge of success or failure?

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE WOMEN MEET.

THE messenger returned.

"They'll see you," she announced.

Mrs. Hollowell breathed freer.

"Thank you!" she impulsively exclaimed.

The woman regarded her with curiosity.

"They don't love you," she bluntly added.

"Still, I don't think they'll dare to do ye any harm. If they do, just yell out and I and your man will give you a lift. They're only women, and we can do up a dozen of sech trash."

It was clear that Mrs. Hollowell's money had gone far deeper to the speaker's heart than any sympathy with the Paines, of which she had but a small supply, if any; but the visitor did not apprehend personal violence. She thought only of seeing them, and she now took her way up the stairs to where she was directed.

Deborah met her at the door. The senior Paine looked at her with curiosity in which all malice was not by any means concealed, but spoke with a degree of civility.

"Come in! Pass to the next room. We can talk there."

Mrs. Hollowell obeyed. Deborah, tall, bony and ugly of face did not make any impression, but when she saw Salome it was different. At first sight there was nothing to tell of the woman's severe malady, and the visitor thought of her only as a disagreeable factor in her life. With the women before her the assertions of Ben Wolf became more life-like, and only a determination to think of them as blackmailers kept her up.

She became the focus of their glances. Deborah looked with the power of virile life, while Salome's eyes started out of her deathlike face quite as keenly, if not so naturally.

They wondered why she was there. That very morning they had received from Judge Hollowell the money he had promised as the price of their silence, and they had thought the whole matter over. Now, the speedy coming of the wife of his home was surprising, but their hearts burned with malignant hatred, and they were not disposed to deny themselves chance to exult over her.

Nothing is more striking than a war of glances between women who are foes by the unalterable force of circumstances. This was exemplified in the event of the moment, and the mutual curiosity and hostility surpassed the delineative power of an artist.

The pause grew awkward, and Mrs. Hollowell turned to the older of her companions.

"You are Deborah Paine?" she questioned.

"I am," was the grim reply.

"And this—"

"Is my daughter Salome."

"You received my name?"

"We received the name you claim!"

"Do you deny my right to it?"

"Why are you here?" brusquely demanded Deborah.

"Because I have seen a man named Benjamin Wolf"—mother and daughter exchanged a quick glance—"and he has told me a story too wild for credence. I have come here to prove or disprove it."

"What is the story?"

"He claims that your daughter is the wife of Judge Otis Hollowell."

"The fool had better have minded his own business, but he told the truth. My daughter, who sits yonder, and who is named Salome, is the only legal wife of Otis Hollowell. They were married over twenty-three years ago."

"Then why is she not in her rightful position at the head of his household?"

"Because he deserted her twenty years ago; because during all that time she never knew where he was until a few weeks ago. Madam, you are the possessor of the judge's later effusion of love, so called. See before you a woman who has been brought to shame and sorrow by him; who has been used with malignant abuse, but who has kept her love through it all—"

Deborah was drawing on her imagination strongly, and waxing eloquent, withal, but she had gone too far for Salome's liking. The latter fiercely broke forth:

"I don't love him! Love that brute? Never, never! I hate him, and"—her arm seemed to get power suddenly, and she stretched it forth with momentary activity—"I hate you, too!"

One moment the accusing hand pointed to Mrs. Hollowell, but her strength went out and the hand fell.

The visitor shivered before the malignant outbreak, but Deborah flashed a warning glance toward the last speaker and hastened to say:

"It may be her love has been crushed out by abuse, but sorrow still remains. All else has been crushed in her."

Mrs. Hollowell tried to be calm and business-like.

"What proof can you give of your claim?" she demanded. "You say you were married to Otis Hollowell. Where is your proof?"

Again Salome's hand was gifted with transient power. It sought the bosom of her dress, and after a tremulous fumble there it came out, holding a paper long and narrow.

"Read!" she directed. "Read, and if you are not convinced, bring the man here!—ay, bring him here, if he dares come!"

She tried to throw the paper at Mrs. Hollowell like a missile of hatred and malevolence, but her strength was not equal to the demands of the occasion. The paper fell, and Deborah picked it up and handed it to the visitor.

"Read!" she, too, directed. "It will answer for itself!"

Mrs. Hollowell took the document.

By this time the Paines had the situation well solved. The fear that Ben Wolf had made some serious blunder was gone, and they no longer apprehended that the judge himself had gone to his second wife with the full story.

She had come to them ignorant of nearly all, and they had her in their power. And all their venom rose, coupled with exultation that they could mock at her in her hour of dismay and grief.

The paper was what purported to be the marriage-certificate of Otis Hollowell and Salome Paine, and the reader was quite right in believing it genuine. It was a severe blow, but she was surprised at her own courage in the hour of trial.

Silently she passed it back to Deborah.

"It would interest me," she confessed, "to know why you did not continue as you began. You have given an explanation in few words, but there is a story with all things; there must be one with this."

"There is!" cried Salome; "a story of man's baseness and ingratitude. Who ever knew man to show any different quality than those I have named?"

Deborah again warned her daughter with a glance.

"Let me tell the story," she requested. "I am a disinterested observer, and can tell all without prejudice."

"My daughter met Otis Hollowell and married him. He was just away from home, where he had quarreled with his family and left in disgust, but he had private means, and money flowed freely. He met my Salome, a girl poor in worldly goods, but rich in all else, and ignorant of the ways of the wicked world."

If Deborah had aspired to pose as a humorist she could never have excelled this *bon mot*.

"They were married, and for a year or more all went well. Then the patience of my poor Salome began to be sorely tried. Her husband's love died, and he abused her vilely. Not to dwell, I'll say that matters went from bad to worse until the patient dove was deserted by him and left to brave the world alone, with a young child to care for—their son."

"She did the best she could, but made the error of not coming to her mother—she was so young, then."

"She put the child out to live with people she thought honest. She fell ill. When she recovered the child was gone."

Deborah had thought it best to draw the long bow with a vengeance, and avoid all reference to the time when Salome confided the child, not to honest people, but to the tender mercies of a raging river.

"She never found the child. Years passed. Otis Hollowell never came to her, and she was too proud to go to him. A few weeks ago she learned that her son was then known as Homer Curtis, and that he was on trial for his life, in this city, for murder. She came here."

"The son is now doomed to death, and it was his own father, Judge Hollowell, who pronounced the fatal sentence!"

Mrs. Hollowell shivered. The horror of such a state of affairs appealed to her even in her own sorrow.

"See how matters are now," resumed Deborah, and the false melancholy in her voice gave place to triumph and joy. "The son has been doomed by his father; the father is living in luxury, while the wife is here in the severest poverty, and afflicted with a spinal trouble which makes it impossible for her to walk a step, or even to feed herself!"

"Yes; and this is the work of a man!" hissed the invalid.

Mirabel Hollowell felt as if the weight of ice was upon her heart. Gone now was her courage.

"Does Judge Hollowell know of this?" she asked. "Does he know of you, and of the son in prison?"

"He does; and he declares I shall starve and my son hang!"

Again Deborah looked warningly at Salome, for the latter seemed bound to go to an extreme, but the visitor was not in a mood to sift these statements carefully. She was nearly overwhelmed; that was all.

"Has Judge Hollowell known of you all the while?"

"He has known where I was, but he took no pains to know more of me," promptly declared Salome.

"I find it hard to believe all this."

"Ask him!"

It was reckless advice, but so many lies had been told that Salome knew they would be exposed if the judge was consulted, and she was anxious to exult while she could.

Her living eyes looked out of the dead face with more than usual brightness. How she enjoyed her triumph over the visitor!

"But the son. Surely, Judge Hollowell would not have done as you claim, knowingly."

"Go to the son and test my words. If you know Otis Hollowell well you must be aware he has upon his arm a peculiar birthmark. I have not seen my son in many years, but he had the birthmark when he was born, and it must be there now. Go, and see for yourself."

Mrs. Hollowell was silent for some time, while the women stared at her in their malignant way. Finally she spoke again:

"What do you intend to do?"

"Nothing!"

"You say you are poor—"

"Yes; and we shall remain so. I would not accept a dollar from Otis Hollowell under any condition."

Deborah had given up trying to check the flood of falsehoods, and perhaps it was as well. She hated the visitor as much as any one could, and was not sorry to degrade her while it could be done.

It was not hard. Clearly, every word was going home with force.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE HOME OF THE WOLF.

MRS. HALLOWELL was anxious to get away. She knew she had learned all she could, and it was so much that she longed to be alone and think—think if there was any way out of the horrible trouble.

She did not feel bitterly toward the judge. This was sure proof that she did not yet believe what she had heard. She saw the possibility of it all, but she could not, would not think ill of Otis Hallowell until the truth, if such it was, was forced home to her mind.

Loyal to the last, she tried to reject all.

She rose.

"I will go home," she observed, very quietly.

"Yes, go!" Salome advised. "Go, and when you are there think of the woman whose place you have usurped—think of the judge's one legal wife here; think of what you are!"

Mirabel's face crimsoned.

"Have I injured you?" she asked.

"Yes."

"How?"

"By marrying him!"

"Do you think I would have done it if I had felt the least suspicion that he had another wife?"

Salome was silent under the power of such a logical question.

"Let us not deal in severe words," advised Deborah, hypocritically. "We have all suffered through the work of this man; we suffer still. Let us not turn one against the other."

"At least," added Salome, "I will not be friends with one who has robbed me of all, whether it be done in innocence or with malice."

Mrs. Hallowell did not try to stem this tide. Indeed, she was glad to find it in existence. If she had found a gentle woman, filled with sorrow and patient in the face of trouble, she would have found it a shock to her credulity, but this violence was ground for some hope, she thought.

She moved toward the door.

"Shall we see you again?" Deborah asked.

"Why should you?"

"It is as you say."

"I may want to come—or I may want to die!" she added, with a sudden yielding to despair.

Salome's living eyes flashed in her dead face. Was this not a glorious revenge? She thought it was.

"Suffer on as we have done," advised Deborah, her evil eyes betraying the malice of the words. "If you are not a legal wife you have, at least, the possession of the judge's home."

Mirabel disdained to answer the sneer. She was at the door. She turned, said "good-night" quietly, and then went down the stairs.

Her servant was waiting, and they were soon on the street. She longed, then, for the privacy of a carriage, and gained the seclusion by engaging a public conveyance. Thus equipped she was soon moving homeward.

What her thoughts were during the drive she could not have told, herself. The struggle for faith was strong and loyal, and she would not yield while hope remained. Salome had gone too far when claiming so much virtue for herself and so many vices for the judge. Whatever might be the case, she could not, would not believe Hallowell had married her when aware of the presence of a living wife.

Believing him incapable of that, Mirabel found her consolation right there.

She tried to plan with calmness and judgment. The story of the prisoner in the Tombs interested her beyond expression, and she was possessed of a strong desire to see the young man, if, indeed, there was such a man there.

The way was open, she thought. If Judge Hallowell had a hold on the warden, so had she. Before he ever achieved his present position she had done him a favor he never had forgotten, and it dwarfed the help lately rendered him by the judge to gain his office. She had cared for his child when it fell ill and he was in poverty, and he knew it would have died but for her help.

The one favor touched his pocketbook; the other, his heart.

She thought she could manage all with the warden's aid.

Arriving home she would have gone to her room and kept quiet for awhile, but Alice came to her with an earnest face.

"Can I see you for a moment?" she asked.

"Certainly, my dear."

"I want you to do something for a poor girl. I have thought of father in connection with the matter, since he is rich and influential, but I see, now, it is to you I should come. She is poor and in trouble. Can't we do something for her?"

Mirabel Hallowell's heart softened to the unknown who was in trouble. A young woman, and in trouble! Her sympathies arose at once. She was in trouble; she knew what it meant to have the canker of grief gnawing at her heart, and sapping the life from her being.

"Tell me of her!" she requested.

"She lives down near the river on West street, lives in a very poor, humble home—an unhappy home, too—and her life is clouded over as yours and mine never were, mother. She

was betrothed to a worthy young man, but he was falsely accused of crime—she says the accusation was false, and I believe it, though it has not been proven; and now he is sentenced to die, though he is innocent!"

In her enthusiasm Alice had become a good deal mixed up, but she had said enough to secure rapt attention.

"Who is this girl?" Mrs. Hallowell asked, eagerly.

"Her name is Mary Wolf—"

"And her lover?"

"His name is Homer Curtis, but, of course the names don't matter—"

Alice went on, but her mother heard nothing. Mirabel Hallowell thought names did matter much in this case.

"What do you know of them?" was the quick question, presently.

"I have seen them both—"

"Seen the young man?"

"Yes; but don't blame me; I went with Mary, and he is a gentleman in appearance and conduct. He was polite and courteous—"

"What looked he like?" the mother demanded.

"I should have thought him nice had he been elsewhere than in the prison cell," replied Alice naively.

"But his personal appearance! What is he like? Does he look like any one you know?"

"I don't think he does. He is of dark complexion, and good looking. He is—"

"Recall Mr. Vinton's looks. Is the prisoner like him?"

"Not at all."

"Or young Mr. Bond?"

"No."

"Then there is your father—"

Mirabel stopped and held her breath for the reply.

"I don't see that he is like him."

Mrs. Hallowell asked other questions, but Alice did not seem good at giving descriptions. She had, however, interested her listener more than she could have hoped for, and the result was soon seen. Alice, returning to her original subject, added:

"Mary Wolf has a father who makes life most unpleasant for her, and she is going to leave there, but she has nowhere to go. Can't we find a place for her?"

For a moment the mother was silent. Then she made answer:

"Prepare for the journey and we will go and see the young woman immediately!"

Alice was surprised, but she did not let the chance slip. She agreed with promptness, and they were soon ready. This time their own carriage was called, and they rode to within two blocks of the house. Here their journey was suspended, but resumed on foot and they went on.

They were soon with Mary.

Briny Ben was out, and with a clear field they evidently had nothing to trouble them. Mirabel proceeded to scan Mary to her full wish.

The first glance did much. Mary's face was not one which could be misunderstood. The stamp of true goodness was there, and it told its own story. Mrs. Hallowell could not have told just why she had come, but she soon found herself interested.

At her request Mary told the story of her life and love, and it touched the listener.

From her Mrs. Hallowell sought to get clue to the character of the man in the Tombs, and she realized that if it were true that like sought like, he must be anything but a ferocious murderer.

Mary stated that her preparations for leaving the house were well under way. Her few possessions were packed, and she was only waiting a little before leaving to return no more.

"Of course my father does not know of this," she added. "I will confess I am afraid of Benjamin Wolf. I know not how he would receive the news of my departure—he might be glad to get rid of me—but I dare not have him know of it. I shall go out quietly, and be seen no more by him."

"We will find you an asylum!" Mrs. Hallowell declared.

"You are very kind, but I do not like to trespass upon your goodness. I have no claim—"

"You have the same claim which one of God's children has upon another," answered Mirabel, with emotion. "I know of no more eloquent claim than that of general humanity. We use our friends with unswerving kindness for what they are to us, but the world's family is large, and it is a sacred duty imposed upon us to do good to all; to use all with the same kindness; to help them when we can. Desert, indeed, would the world be but for the bond of good will."

The kindness of the answer was too much for Mary's unstrung nerves, and she burst into tears. When she had grown calmer she could not very well take the offer in more than one way, and she consented to accept her new friend's proposal without conditions.

Mrs. Hallowell did not think of taking her to her own home, but she knew of a safe resort, and to this it was arranged that the girl should go at once.

This decision had just been reached when

heavy steps sounded in the hall below. Mary knew that step, and she changed color.

"Go to the next room!" she exclaimed; "it is my father. God! He may not stay long."

Mrs. Hallowell and Alice went, and none too soon. The Water Wolf entered.

He seemed to be in his surliest mood. He said nothing, but threw his hat down and then took a chair. Mary tried to appear at ease, but for a long time her composure was not tried. The Wolf looked only at the floor, and scowled viciously, as if his thoughts ran on unpleasant subjects. He was considering something of more than usual moment, and, with the ladies in the next room, Mary was thoroughly uneasy.

Anon he looked up and fixed his gaze on her. She saw this, though she did not meet the regard openly, and she believed it was full of malice. Something was coming. What?

CHAPTER XXXV.

HUNTED.

THE Water Wolf spoke:

"So you're goin' ter leave me, gal?"

The abrupt question made Mary start nervously. How did he know of it? Had he been spying on her and her visitors before his steps were heard in the hall? She made a great effort to answer quietly.

"I seem to be here. What do you mean by my leaving?"

"I seen your clothes packed up."

Mary breathed freer. Bad as the situation was, it was better than to have him know the Hallowells were in the house.

"What does that indicate?" she returned, trying to speak lightly.

"Shows you're goin' ter skip out."

"That does not follow—"

"Yes; et does. Don't try ter gammon me, gal; et won't work. Ben Wolf ain't no fool, an' don't you pick him up fer one."

"I have no such thought, but—"

"Hold up! Have I objected ter yer goin'?"

"No."

"Wal, I shall not. You kin go ez soon ez you please; I don't keer a durn. See?"

Mary regarded him in wonder. There was no perceptible malice in his voice, and this was such a rarity as to be a surprise in itself.

"All I ask o' you is that you keep a still tongue in her head, gal. You an' me ain't cut out ter go along tergether, an' we are best apart. I dunno ez I hev any use fer a house-keeper, so you kin go ef you'll do me no harm."

"Certainly I would not harm my own father—"

"Gal, I'm no father o' yours!"

The Wolf made the surprising announcement abruptly. He did not seem to have any special feeling in the matter, but while Mary sat in silent wonder he went on rapidly:

"You an' me ain't always got along o' the best, fer you wa'n't the sort of a gal I took to, but I do reckon you hev tried ter do about the right thing. As we are ter part now, I don't see why I shouldn't do ye a small favor by the way. Et's about the only favor I shall have ter answer fer when I close up the books."

"No; you ain't no child o' mine. Et was the old woman's work ter adopt ye, an' I let her hev her own way, ye see. We took ye when you wasn't bigger nor a woodchuck, an' we never let on but you was ours. Really, you was the child of a family named Baker, over nigh Passaic."

"They was so mighty poor they was glad ter let ye go. Ef you want ter see any o' yer kin, you go ter old Eldad Baker, of that section, an' you kin convince him. He's yer grandfather, though he ain't heerd from you in all these years."

"You're the image o' yer mother, an' a blind man could see it. Ef that ain't enough, hand over them baby clothes o' yours that the old woman always saved. You had them on when we got ye."

The Wolf picked up his hat and rose.

"I'm goin', now," he remarked. "I'll see ye in the mornin'."

His story had been rarely interesting, and Mary would have had many questions to ask at any other time, but, as it was, she was too glad to get rid of him to check his departure. He went, much to the relief of all others concerned.

He did not come back that night. He went along the line of the piers for two hours, his course seeming vague and objectless, his face always dark, sullen and thoughtful. It was plain he was not at ease. When he tired of tramping he found a box on a pier, and, crawling into it, passed the night in that resort. He had been afraid to return home, and did not trust any one well enough to seek shelter elsewhere.

In the morning, if he thought of his promise to see Mary, he did not keep it. He went, instead, to a place which had been a resort of his for some years; a lair of men as disregarding of the rights of property as himself; and there he stayed until noon.

He might have stayed further had it not been for a discovery which not only sent him away but frightened him.

Looking out of the door of the shanty-like structure he was in, he saw two men standing

only a few rods away. One was Duncan Davies; the other—

The Wolf felt his blood chill. It was the person he had known as Dan Murphy; the same man he had stabbed on the pier—stabbed, as he had supposed, fatally.

For a moment he could hardly persuade himself he was looking at a living being, and, when he realized that such was the fact, he was even more alarmed. Dan Murphy, living, was worse than Dan Murphy dead.

"An' Davies is with him!" the Wolf hissed. "I always mistrusted that critter, an' now I have him ter rights. It's wal I kep' away from home. Davies is tryin' ter guide him ter me. They'll come in here—yes, they'll come, but they won't find me!"

The resort had points which were not known to every one. Davies had been there before, but he never had been admitted to the circle of the favored few who knew there was a secret entrance.

Briny Ben spoke hurriedly to the few persons present, bidding them hide the fact that he had been there at all, and then made for the sub-entrance. His retreat was successful, and he was soon so far away as to feel safe for the time.

One thing was sure, however: there was no real safety for him in New York.

It was plain that Davies had undertaken to betray him, and he had wholesome fear of Dan Murphy, whoever Dan might be.

"I've got ter get out o' this town on the jump," the Wolf decided, "but I won't go until I've got my share o' the Hollowell money. Deb an' her daughter must have it by this time, an' I'll call on them immediate."

It was not a long journey to Deborah's house, and he was soon ringing the bell. He had no difficulty in gaining entrance, and he plunged into the presence of the Paine combination impetuously.

"I've come for money!" he declared.

Both Deborah and Salome looked at him coolly.

"You're too early," the former announced.

"What?"

"We have got none, yet."

"What! nothing from Judge Hollowell?"

"Not yet."

The Wolf's eyes flamed to their limit.

"I don't believe it!" he cried.

"Well, it's true, nevertheless."

"What in thunder hev you been doin'?"

"Hollowell promised to have it here yesterday, but he sent a note that it would not be ready until to-morrow."

Deborah expected to be able to defy the waterman by the morrow, so she replied calmly.

Ben stood glaring at the woman in a rage, suspicion in every line of his face.

"Ef I thought you was deceivin' me I'd—"

"Be at peace; we are not doing anything of the sort."

"But I need money; I'm in the worst need of it!"

"So are we."

"Can't you give me a bit!—can't you hand over a hundred dollars?"

"Impossible! We have only five dollars to our name, and we need all of that."

"But I'm in a bad way—"

"Come when we have it and we will keep our promise. There's no love lost between us, Ben Wolf," she candidly added, "but you deserve a share of this money, and since chance put you onto our game, we'll divide with you as agreed upon."

Ben Wolf thrust one grimy finger into his mouth and began to gnaw at it like a genuine wolf. He felt himself about run down. He had conceived a wholesome fear for Dan Murphy since his reappearance from the dead, as it were, and he wanted to be gone from the city. But he could not go without money.

He stood and gnawed at his finger while the women watched him curiously, and with some apprehension. They knew him well enough to hold him in awe, bold though Deborah was, and feared the result if he should learn of their treachery.

Yet, they were bound to carry off the money which Salome had in her dress, if such a thing was possible.

Suddenly he raised his eyes.

"Ain't I stood by ye in this?" he asked.

"Yes," Deborah admitted.

"Wal, I deserve somethin', don't I?"

"I said you did."

"Ef I thought you was playin' me fer a fool—"

"I tell you we have not got the money!"

"Then I'm off!"

He turned toward the door and went out without another word.

"He yielded easier than I thought he would,"

So spoke Deborah, and in so thinking she reasoned without her usual shrewdness. She should have remembered that he had failed to say he would be around on the morrow and get his share of the money. This was a suspicious fact, if they had been sharp enough to think of it. It indicated something, too, and that was that he had another plan.

He did some quick work when he had a

chance, and hurried on toward a more pretentious quarter of the city. It was that where Judge Hollowell lived. He was nearing the house with long steps, and wondering if he would be admitted, when he met with good luck and Hollowell, himself, at one and the same time. The latter was walking toward the end of the block, and Ben hastened to accost him.

"Excuse me, yer Honor, but I reckon you remember me."

"I reckon I do," Hollowell agreed, none too amiably.

"I come about my daughter—"

"Such was your excuse, I remember, but I have gained light on you since then. I am told by Deborah Paine that you are a sort of parasite on them, and an aspirer to a share of plunder."

"That's so, judge," Briny Ben hastily agreed.

"I be them things, an' I want ter know when you're ter be ready fer ter hand over the money. See?"

"What money?" Hollowell demanded, sharply.

"That your are ter give them, ye know."

"Ask them."

"I've jest come from there, an' they say it will be ready ter-morrer, but I need it powerful bad, now, an'—"

"Do they say they have not got it?"

"Yes."

"Then you are being fooled, man; the money is in their hands according to agreement, and has been for twenty-four hours. They are deceiving you. Go to them if you want cash!"

With these words the judge walked on. Ben's face was a study. He did not think of doubting the assertion he had heard, and all his anger flashed up against Deborah and Salome.

"I was afeerd they was foolin' me, an' now, I know it! How dared they? Yes; how dared they? By the fiends! I'll have money or revenge!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE ARM OF A MAN.

NIGHT was again over the city.

Mrs. Hollowell donned her street garments and left the house alone. She told a servant she was going to see a friend who was ill. To her husband and daughter she said nothing. Had they known she was going to leave at such a late hour, both would have protested warmly against the rashness of such a step.

It was the period when they were thinking of retiring, but she was going forth alone.

With what object?

She had a very clear purpose in mind, and she proceeded to carry it out. She had made arrangements to have a public carriage, with a trustworthy driver, waiting at a given point, and to this rendezvous she went. She was not disappointed, and she was soon being conveyed south.

When the carriage paused it was near the entrance to the Tombs. The driver alighted and went to ask if the warden was in. The reply was in the affirmative, and he delivered his message.

A lady wished to see the official.

There was not much delay, and the visitor, heavily veiled, passed the grim doors of the building and went to the warden's room. There she removed the veil. The warden sat dumfounded. It was some time before he could command his voice; then he broke forth explosively:

"Mrs. Hollowell! Great heavens!"

"You seem surprised, sir."

"Surprised? Why, I'd as soon have thought of seeing my grandmother's ghost. That is—I am very glad to see you, but I didn't expect it," he added, apologetically.

"Mr. Warden, is your youngest child well?" the lady asked, sweetly.

It was the child which owed its life to her, in the father's opinion, and she was shrewd enough to remind him of the child, then.

"I am thankful to say she is quite well, madam."

"That is good news."

"She often speaks of you, Mrs. Hollowell. We teach her to reverse you next to things heavenly, madam," declared the grateful warden.

"Thank you, sir. I should be glad to speak further of her, but I am here on important business. Can I ask a favor of you, sir?"

"A thousand of them! Whatever you ask shall be done."

"Very well. I wish to go secretly to the cell of a prisoner here whose name is Homer Curtis!"

Widely opened the eyes of the listener. He looked—he could do no more. She wished to see Homer Curtis! What next?

"I wish, not to see and talk with this young man," pursued the lady, "but to enter his cell when he is asleep. If he is now awake, I will wait until he is asleep. All I ask is to see him as I have said."

The warden moved his hands in a helpless way. Not for a moment did he think of denying the request. He would, as he had said, do anything for her, and he intended to prove it at once.

He said as much, and went to see if the condemned man was already asleep. He went with a dazed feeling.

"The whole family has been to see this murderer. What next?—what next? Why, why should they feel an interest in him? Perhaps they know, but I'll be hanged if I do! What next?"

He soon returned to say that Curtis was sound sleep, and that he would escort the visitor to the cell door, and then stand at a distance and see that no one interrupted her.

Mrs. Hollowell felt her courage waver as she went. It had been no easy task to get herself nerved up to undertake the venture, and, now it was done, she trembled and realized the rashness of her step.

At the cell door she was given a light and told to enter.

She obeyed.

Once within she looked around and shivered. The place was grim and gloomy beyond her wildest dreams, and she would have retreated had not so much been at stake. But the die was cast and she fought down the weakness.

Curtis lay in his cot. He was as oblivious of all around him as when he had another visitor at night. One of his arms lay outside the covers, and the strong hand seemed to beckon an invitation to the hesitating woman to settle the question in her mind at once. Yet, she gazed long before she stirred, and only moved when she did because she suddenly remembered the importance of utilizing every moment.

She went nearer.

First of all she studied the face before her. Was there any likeness to Judge Hollowell? Others had failed to see it, but her eyes were keener, or her imagination stronger. She believed she did see the resemblance—faint, but perceptible.

While she stood thus there was a stir in the corridor: one so quiet as to leave no sound, but one fraught with meaning. The warden had loyally turned his back so as not to spy upon the woman he admired so much. By so doing he saved one quarter from possible interruption, but he forgot the other. He forgot, too, that a certain man had entered the prison a short time before, and was still there.

This man was Chief Claxton, and he it was who went to the cell door. He must have had an inkling of what was being done, for he gave no evidence of surprise when he saw who was there.

Instead, he simply stood and looked while Mrs. Hollowell gazed at the prisoner's face.

The arm before her gave the opportunity she coveted. The loose sleeve of Curtis's night-robe was no impediment to her search. Carefully she pushed the sleeve back. Then she became again inactive, gazing at what was revealed.

The lamp-light showed her color going and coming; it showed that she was deeply moved.

The watcher at the door smiled slightly.

"The proud judge's wife has found the proof of disgrace!" Detective Claxton murmured.

She had found the birthmark, certainly. She saw the mark alleged to be there, and saw it was the counterpart of that on her husband's arm. Even nature spoke to prove all she had heard.

There was no more to be done. One minute's look was as good as ten, and she was cool enough, disturbed though she was, to remember the danger of the prisoner's awakening. Once more her gaze strayed to his face. The resemblance she thought she had seen before was now heightened by her imagination, and the face of the judge seemed there repeated.

"It must be true!" she whispered, brokenly.

Chief Claxton saw signs of her leaving, and he retreated to the other end of the corridor as quietly as he had come, unseen by any one there—retreated to go as quietly out of the Tombs, half an hour later.

Mrs. Hollowell turned and made her own exit as soon as possible. When once more in the warden's room she gave him a sum of money, remarking:

"This is for your youngest child!"

So Otis Hollowell had said on the occasion of his memorable visit, and the warden was almost too dazed to reply.

Again in the privacy of her carriage Mrs. Hollowell lost her control. The full measure of the unhappy affair came over her. With all hope gone she saw where she stood. Salome and this convicted son lived. What was she?

The following morning Judge Hollowell was alone in his private room. Mirabel approached the door. For a moment she hesitated to gain courage, and then, contrary to her usual custom, pushed the door open without knocking and entered.

The judge sat at the table, his face buried in his hands, his whole air that of deep dejection. The previous evening he had again seen the senior judge, but the result had been very unfavorable, and he saw no chance of another trial for Homer Curtis.

He was thinking of this, and of Mirabel.

He heard her steps, and looking up, revealed a haggard, pallid face.

Exerting all of her self-control she managed to speak with a measure of calmness.

"Excuse me for intruding upon you, but I wished to see you on matters of importance."

Hallowell was always courteous, and he did not forget the inbred way of his nature, then. He rose and placed a chair for her.

"I shall be pleased to hear you," he answered.

"I am afraid this will not be so. I wish to speak of very serious things, judge," she responded.

His gaze wavered for a moment.

"I trust nothing is wrong?"

"I fear something is very wrong. To be plain, and to lose no time, I will say I have lately come into the possession of certain facts which appall me. I refer to what concerns not only myself but Salome and Homer Curtis!"

The judge drew a quick breath. He knew, then, that the secret was out, and ruin menaced him. A mist swam before his eyes; he brushed his hand across his face with a nervous air. He stood and said nothing. It was not guilt; it was helpless dismay.

"I am told," she went on, herself moved so that her utterance was little more than a sob, "that you have a wife whose claim to the name dates back of the time I first saw you."

Suddenly, sharply cried the judge:

"In the sight of man I may have; in the sight of Divine Providence I have not!"

"Yet, Salome lives."

Judge Hallowell resumed his seat. His manner was that of one who abandons hope for time and eternity. Mirabel would have been blind not to read in his face how he suffered, yet, when he spoke, his voice had hardly a tremor.

"How did you learn of this?" he asked.

"I have seen both Salome and Curtis."

"And you know the story?"

"All!"

"All? Then you know—"

"That I have no right in your home."

Mirabel pressed her hand to her heart. She could hardly articulate, but in her manner there was no accusation. Between the two at that moment there was no anger; only deep sorrow and despair.

He put out his hand in quick deprecation.

"You have all right; it is I who have none; it is I who should go hence and forever hide my head. This is maddening to me. Was it not enough I should suffer? Must you feel the curse, too?"

She was silent.

"Do you blame me utterly? Do you regard me as the vilest of men, or is there one grain of forgiveness possible when you remember—"

"Think of Alice!"

"Just heaven! I have thought of her, and of you, until I am almost mad! Why should this thing ever have occurred? Why should others be dragged to ruin and shame with me?"

"Did you think of that when we were married? Did you— But I have one other question to ask first. Did—did you know that Salome lived when we were married?"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

GLOATING OVER THEIR PREY.

JUDGE HALLOWELL gazed in sudden horror.

"They tell me you did know of this," Mirabel went on, "but I cannot, will not believe it until your own lips confess the fact. I will not believe you knew—tell me you did not!"

She stretched out her hands imploringly, while the look of horror suddenly gave place on his face to a flush of anger.

"Who says I knew Salome lived?" he cried.

"Who dares to utter such a vile calumny?"

"It was she."

"Oh! the viper!—the base perverter of truth— But why do I rant? Mirabel, I swear to you by all my hopes of Heaven I did not know! I swear that I thought her dead, and never doubted the fact until a few days ago. I, commit such a vile deed? Just Heaven! where is your vengeance when this tale goes unpunished!"

The vehemence of his manner carried conviction to Mirabel's mind. There was one bright gleam in the black record.

"I told you I would not believe it!" she whispered. "I had faith in you."

"And they—they— But let me be calm! Almighty Father, teach me to be calm! Fame, and worldly glory, and transient success are as nothing in the balance opposed to honor and good repute. God of mercy, whatever my punishment may be, do not let me be disgraced in the sight of the woman I love!"

The strong face trembled, the strong voice broke, and tears rolled down the face of the iron judge—tears which were his most sacred, ennobling and manly contribution to a life of power and firm control.

If Mirabel had felt a doubt she felt it no longer. Whatever the past had been; whatever the future might be, he had not been guilty of intentional wrong-doing. She believed it fully.

Again he struggled with himself; again composure came in a measure.

"Tell me all you know," he requested, brokenly.

She told the story in full. When it was done she heard what he had to say. Plainly,

truthfully each spoke, and all was made as clear as they saw it. All the darkness was revealed. One had as much insight to the case as the other.

Then they faced the situation. They talked of past and future. They talked, and if it was with shaking voices, there was no reproach, no anger—only the deepest of sorrow. Seeing no light for the days to come they tried to plan. Hallowell had thought before. They must separate, but how? Would it not be best for her and Alice to go to Europe with a due excuse, and there live out the lives which seemed so black and hopeless? So he had planned.

As for himself—

He felt that it would be happiness to lie down and die—die, and let his record be covered with himself in the grave.

There were sounds in the hall. A knock came at the door. At the bidding the door opened. A servant was there.

"Two women to see you, sir!" she announced.

She held out cards. Mechanically he took them and read the names thereon. Then his face flushed. They were those of Deborah Paine and Salome. His first feeling was one of indignation that they should dare to come there, but something more practical followed. He held the cards out quickly to Mirabel.

"I will see them in the parlor," he explained.

"Do you listen to all. I think this is only a slight parting flurry; they are to leave the city, and they doubtless have come simply to gloat over me once more. Listen to all, and let me convict them out of their own mouths of lying to you."

Mirabel caught at the plan and promised to do as directed. Then the judge gave orders to have the callers admitted.

They had come in their carriage with the grandeur of newly-acquired wealth, Salome being still in the chair, and in this she was brought into the house and to the parlor.

Hallowell did not appear until they were well settled. Then he entered with all his old calmness.

"To what am I indebted for the doubtful honor of this call?" he coldly asked.

"We are about to leave the city, and we thought it impolite to slight you," sneeringly answered Deborah.

"Would not the money I have given you have soothed the wound to your feeling?"

"Perhaps, but we are neighborly, you see."

"Too much so."

"Besides, we wanted to see your newest wife."

"Mrs. Hallowell is ignorant of all these things, and will remain so."

"Are you sure of that?" cried Salome, with sudden life.

"I have not told her."

"But I have!"

"You agreed to go away quietly if you had the money."

"We are going, but your darling called on us, and I told her all."

"Infamous!" cried the judge. "Why need she ever know of it? This was an evil deed. But she will not blame me, for I sinned blindly, if it was sin. I married her under the belief that you were dead; I thought you dead for twenty years."

"You would have been enlightened if I had known where you were."

"You willfully let me believe you dead."

"I did, and I am glad of it. It has led you to commit a step you cannot undertake. I let you think me dead because I hated you, but time has shown me that I sowed better than I knew; it brings me revenge, now!"

"Be careful!" cautioned Deborah. "You are in the house where the other wife lives."

"What of it? Let her know as much or as little as she may, the fact remains that she can't step into my shoes as legal wife. My claim is proof against all."

"You speak idle words," sternly observed Hallowell. "I want you to leave this house."

"Let's see you make us!" mocked Salome.

"Would you resist?"

"I would tell my story to all!"

"Is there no end to your malignant hatred?"

"None!"

"You could command the respect of no one, for you are governed only by the most ignoble of sentiments. I have paid you to be silent, but even now you seek to wound and annoy me by acting in a spirit of revenge, the worst of all human crimes."

"Scoff all you will; we can go to your proud wife if you abuse us. Ay, we will see the immaculate Mrs. Hallowell!"

"Mrs. Hallowell is here!"

The words came in a new voice from near the door, and as all looked that way they saw Mirabel, herself. She had entered quietly, and now stood with unwavering face and resolute air.

"I am here," she added, "and all your threats go for nothing. Your power of harm is over, and if the future is dark you can have no hand in making it more so. I know the truth; I know how you have lied to me, and that it was through your fault that an honorable man did a deed which has brought sorrow. Yes; I know

him to be honorable, and though we may have to part I will ever honor and uphold him!"

She took her place by the judge's side, and her manner was firm and undaunted. Before that loyalty the plotters were abashed, and neither had a retort ready, deeply as burned their hatred.

"Enough!" pronounced Hallowell. "We need waste no more words. Will you go, vampires, or shall I have you ejected?"

"Never!"

So began Salome, but more prudent Deborah checked her. They had the money; they might lose it if they paused to seek for small revenge.

"Yes, we'll go," she agreed, "but we know we won't leave you any great measure of happiness."

"And we leave you the consolation of knowing that your legal wife holds the balance of power and will keep it!" added Salome. "Yes, I'll keep it, and you may wish in vain for freedom. Come what may, I am the one legal wife!"

"It's a lie!"

The words came in a hoarse voice from the door, and again they turned. Another person stood there; a grim, burly figure; a figure now bruised and blackened, while on the face of the person was many a stain, as if of blood imperfectly wiped away.

It was Briny Ben, but not the Water Wolf of old.

As he stood before them he swayed to and fro, and it was to be seen that some injury was upon him; something which had sapped his strength and made him weak to an extreme. But his eyes still gleamed brightly, and their regard was turned upon Deborah and Salome with anything but good-will.

"I've follered ye!" he added, hoarsely; "I've follered ye as I would a panther that had done me ter death. Yes, I've follered, fer I had sworn ter be revenged on ye. I've got my death-wound, an' I wouldn't had it only ye refused ter give me my share o' the money, an' kep' me in New York when I wanted ter git away—kep' me here ter meet the man who give me this hurt. I'm dyin', an' et's all your work; but I'm alive yet, an' I'll hev revenge!"

The words were poured forth in a wild strain, with scarcely a pause, and no one could check him. There was a sort of rude eloquence in it all, and his evident condition of collapse made it the more impressive.

Now Deborah found her tongue. Springing to her feet she exclaimed:

"Stop! Stop, and you shall have your share of the money!"

"Et's too late!" the Wolf replied; "the money won't do me no good now. I'm goin' on a road wher' money ain't of any use, an' there's only one thing I do want. That is—revenge!"

"Stop, and anything we can do for you—"

"You kin do nothing."

Both Deborah and Salome were very much excited. Both tried to speak at once, and neither made any headway against the Wolf. Weak he was in body, but his will was fixed.

Twice he turned and tried to speak to the judge, and twice they drowned his utterance, but he persevered. Raising his voice high he exclaimed:

"That woman lies when she says she is, or ever was, your wife! She was my wife, but never yours!"

Silence followed the assertion. The dismayed plotters gave up, while Hallowell could not accept the truth as yet.

"She was my wife," Ben persisted, "but she ain't been fer twenty years. She got a divorce, an' sence then she's gone her way an' I mine. But your wife—that she never was!"

"I don't understand—"

So the judge began, but Ben interrupted:

"You think she is the same Salome you married, but she ain't. You was right in thinkin' that Salome was drowned in the flood; she was. She died exactly as you was led ter believe at the time, but this woman was not in the flood. Don't you see the point? This is Eliza Paine, sister to Salome!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BROKEN BOND.

THE announcement fell with force upon all there, but those to whom it was important could not realize the truth. Briny Ben had ample time to go on, and he improved it.

"When you married Salome I was already married ter Eliza, but she an' I was never called upon ter visit ye. You was a big ketch fer one o' the Paines, while Eliza wa'n't much better. Old Deb seen the importance o' keepin' us out o' your sight, so we wouldn't disgust ye with yer new family connections; an' you never in yer life heard that Salome had a sister. She did; the sister was named Eliza, an' was my wife; an' there she is, now!"

He leveled his pointing finger at the woman who has figured in these pages as Salome, and his revenge was well under way.

The plotters had nothing to say.

"They don't deny it!" Ben cried.

Deborah and Eliza did not reply. They knew

the assertions of the Wolf would be proven if any attempt was made.

"I reckon you ketch on," pursued Ben. "Ez long ez Salome was drowned afore you ever met the present Mrs. Hollowell, your marriage ter the last-named was as legal as legal could be, an' she is yer only wife. See?"

They saw, at last, and there was thanksgiving in the hearts of Otis Hollowell and his wife. As Ben had said, Hollowell had never before heard of a sister of Salome's, and the resemblance of the two, together with the knowledge on his part that time and illness bring many changes, had kept him from suspecting that the woman who claimed to be Salome was any one else.

Husband and wife looked at each other, and in their eyes was pictured a happiness such as words could not have expressed. The evil clouds which had been on their lives rolled away, and the light shone gloriously.

Deborah exchanged glances with Eliza.

"I think we will go," she remarked.

"I think you will not!" coolly retorted Hollowell. "You shall abide by the course you have marked out. You will give up the money of which you have blackmailed me, and if the law can reach you—"

"It kin!" cried Ben. "They kep' a thieves' resort in Feladelfy, an' was receivers of stolen goods. The officers want them there."

"Yes, and they want you here," angrily added Deborah. "You have been a river thief in New York."

"He has been more!"

Once again an interruption came from an unseen speaker. Once again those present looked toward the door.

Chief Claxton was there.

He walked rapidly to Briny Ben's side.

"I arrest you for murdering Morris Strong!" he declared.

The Water Wolf put up his hands promptly.

"Go ahead!" he directed. "All you'll get out of it will be a dead man, fer I'm about done. You've got the right tack, though; I did do that job. You kin let Homer Curtis out o' prison as soon as you please, fer he had no hand in it. I don't know ez I would admit this, but my gal, Mary, is dead gone on the boy, an' ez she's the only one who ever stood by me but my second wife, I reckon I'll do the gal a good turn afore I go under. I did kill Morris Strong. Curtis is innocent!"

Again Judge Hollowell was dumfounded with surprise.

"But," added the Wolf, "I don't know how in thunder you got at it!"

"Easy enough," Claxton calmly answered.

"When I was engaged to start in for Curtis I was bound to consider him innocent. I asked myself who could be guilty if he was not. The reply in my mind was quick, and so simple I wondered it had not been thought of before by the defense. *Somebody* had a motive for killing. Who? I remembered that, to spite Curtis, Strong had gone to the police and told that goods had been purchased of thieves and sold in their store. I asked myself who else could have so much motive for killing him as the men he thoughtlessly gave away in order to be revenged on Curtis."

"Durned ef you didn't get it jest right!" exclaimed Ben.

"I told of my theory to no one, but looked for river thieves. I found *you*!"

"You did, by thunder!"

"You found me when we met on the pier," Claxton continued. "You gave me a knife wound I still carry. I fell into the water, but was not unconscious. I swam to the support of the pier, and there remained quiet until you were gone away. I crawled out with difficulty, and was then in such bad shape that I lay in the house of a laborer who took me in, caring for me well, until the next noon, when I partially recovered."

"You did, an' too much. You was my death."

"Certain words once dropped by your one-time friend, Duncan Davies, led me to believe, not that he knew of your act in regard to Strong, but that he suspected it."

"I went to him, worked upon him and got him to confess his suspicion, and to give some strong corroborative evidence. Then he set out to find you, but you had disappeared from your usual haunts, and it was slow work."

"Davies found you before I did. I am aware that he met you in a house on Seventh avenue, and that a fight followed in which both of you were severely used. He is under a doctor's care. Acting on information as to where you were last seen I followed with zeal, and succeeded in tracing you here."

"You did too durned wal, but what does it matter? The Wolf is shorn of his claws, and he's about done."

"Tell me just how you killed Morris Strong."

"Wal, I heerd he had gone ter the police an' blowed, an' it made me red-hot. I went ter look fer him. I see him with Curtis, an' I just hung around until Curtis went off. Then I met Strong on the pier an' went fer him rough-shod with my tongue. He drew a revolver—it was Curtis's an' I s'pose Strong stole it—an' as I didn't intend ter be shot, I wrested it away

from him. I was too mad ter keer what I did, an' turned the revolver on him an' pulled the trigger. The bullet went straight; he fell dead. Then I run away. That's all. He was a traitor, an' I'm glad I did it."

Chief Claxton turned to Hollowell.

"I think this clears young Curtis," he remarked.

"It does, indeed," the judge replied, with emotion.

"Then my work is about done."

"You don't know how much I feel indebted to you—"

"I think I do, exactly," dryly answered Claxton.

"But there are things unknown to you—"

"Not many. While looking for the murderer I have learned a good deal more. I know of your recent trials, and I am prepared to add corroboration to what Briny Ben has said of the two women, yonder. I have heard them say they were not what they pretended, and that the younger one was never your wife. You have been the victim of a vile plot, but the truth is out. You and Mrs. Hollowell are free from all suspicion, and I think if you want to acknowledge your son you will not feel ashamed to tell the story in public."

"You are right. Nothing disgraceful attaches to it now."

Claxton looked at Mrs. Hollowell.

"It will not be hard, I think, to found a happy family, for the work has been progressing more rapidly than any one of you know. You had better compare notes and see how this is. Yes; I guarantee you happiness."

"May my curse go with them!" cried Eliza.

"It will do no injury, but you can think of it in prison. Thanks to the hint given by Benjamin, I'll see that the Philadelphia authorities are not cheated out of their prey."

"Judge Hollowell, I call upon you to save us!" Eliza exclaimed.

"Dare you have all the past known?"

"All!"

"Think again."

"I have thought already. I say you shall taste the full measure of law. There is no crime in my past, and as for my weaknesses, I can bear the full penalty."

"Oh! if I had my strength! I would kill you!—I would—"

"Better omit it," coolly advised Claxton. "You have played your game and lost. Accept the result as amiably as you can, for you are helplessly in the toils. Judge Hollowell, I have a batch of warrants in my pocket. Shall I relieve you of the Paine family?"

"Immediately, if you please," the judge answered. "Mirabel, let us go. The past is over; we will begin life anew!"

Before leaving the house Claxton undertook to set Edward Acton right with the family. He was wise enough to know that the time to secure forgiveness was when the Hollowells were so deeply moved. He frankly explained all to the judge. He had made no miscalculation. The latter was surprised to learn he had so long had a police agent in the family, but he took it philosophically.

Alice was called into the council and all made plain; then Edward was sent for. He received their forgiveness with gratitude, but could not persuade himself that it was wholly sincere.

When Claxton did go off with his prisoners, Alice was engaged in the task of convincing the melancholy young man. The detective thought she was making good progress.

The next steps in the work can be imagined. The senior judge could now consider Homer Curtis's case without fear of doing himself injustice, and, as there was no longer any charge against the prisoner, he was soon liberated in due legal form.

The public was not allowed to know of the full facts at once. Homer went to Europe for a year. When he returned the city had almost forgotten the once-prisoner of the Tombs, and by rare good luck no one recognized him as a public character when he was introduced, on his return, as Judge Hollowell's son.

He had not gone abroad alone. Mary had gone as his wife, and, on their return, they entered upon the new life with every prospect of happiness. The old line of business was abandoned, but the judge found something better for his son, and he has never regretted that he took him into the family.

As in the past, so has the young man's record been honorable since. He and Mary enjoy the happiness they deserve.

Alice's efforts to cure Acton's melancholy were so successful that when they were married, the other day, no one saw any evidences of down-heartedness in his manner.

Briny Ben died of his wound, but not until he had made full confession in formal way. Davies was allowed to leave the city. Deborah went to the State Prison in Pennsylvania. Eliza was considered no subject for such a place, but a sudden attack of illness ended her life.

Judge Hollowell and his wife are happy—never so happy before. Each had seen additional proof of the other's worth, and their lives

are marked with a tenderness not manifested of old. Now Hollowell gives not all his time to business cares, but remembers the light and love of the home-circle, and the rest and peace which is his is a fit reward. If he is an iron judge when on the bench, the iron is cast out when he crosses the threshold of his home.

Chief Claxton was deemed to have once more demonstrated his right to the title of the "Record-Breaker," and his latest case gained him renown. He was credited with having saved a man from the very shadow of the gallows, and, though much of the story was never told, he was accorded even higher rank among the great detective experts of New York.

THE END.

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